

THE POET'S WISDOM

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THE POET'S WISDOM

*The Humanists, the Church, and the Formation of
Philosophy in the Early Renaissance*

BY

TIMOTHY KIRCHER



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On the cover: Andrea di Bonaiuto (14th CE), "The Church Militant and Triumphant," detail: St. Thomas Aquinas and Heretics (detail). Spanish Chapel, S. Maria Novella, Florence, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY. [COA0034010].

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To Tonya

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Dominicans and Humanists in the Fourteenth Century” in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 283–294. Each of these articles has been extensively revised and re-written for this book.

T.K.
Greensboro, North Carolina
April 2005

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Bicci di Lorenzo (1373–1452), *St. Nicholas of Bari Rebuking the Tempest*. Originally painted for S. Niccolo in Caffagio, Florence. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, U.K./Bridgeman Art Library.

Fig. 2. Giovanni di Paolo (c.1403–1482), *St. Nicholas of Tolentino Saving a Ship* (1457). Philadelphia Museum of Art: John G. Johnson Collection, 1917, inv. 723.

“Man can embody truth but he cannot know it”

W.B. Yeats

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the fourteenth century two humanist writers, Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, were developing new ways of examining fundamental questions concerning ethics and human knowledge. For these humanists, the individual consciousness was essentially variable, subject to the movement of time and the influence of emotion. Their conception, rooted in a new understanding of history, challenged the Church's claim for the immutability of its ethical and ontological teachings, and produced one of the most decisive shifts in the study of the self since St. Augustine. While a wide range of spokesmen for the Church could be found in Italy, they devoted their efforts to re-articulating its traditional view of moral rectitude, in response to the emergent conditions of the time.

By 1350 Latin Christian orthodoxy was in crisis. The Papacy had been residing in Avignon for over forty years and the Black Death had killed as much as a third of Europe's population. Less visibly the growing number of literate men and women, especially in the Italian communes, was demanding guides to moral behavior, and some were voicing their criticism of the clergy's moral standing, encouraged by the examples of Dante and the Franciscan Jacopone da Todi. Giorgio Cracco has written of a widespread "malaise" among the faithful, "an anxiety of being in this world." He portrays a struggle between an inward striving for religious renewal and the institutional efforts, both civil and ecclesiastical, to channel this striving toward public morality. In Cracco's view this external morality only masked the spiritual discontent of the faithful, whose energies, after the Plague, were expressed as a suffering in an increasingly profane world.¹

¹ Giorgio Cracco, "La spiritualità italiana del Tre-Quattrocento: Linee interpretive," *Studia patavina* 18 (1971): 74–116, citation 77: "un disagio, un'angoscia di essere in questo mondo."

The clergy was pressed to review its relation to its lay audience. Was the religious life at its finest a *fuga mundi*, a flight from the secular world? To what degree were lay listeners still willing to pattern their lives according to eremitic values, as they had been urged to do since the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century? Could the values of cloister and hermitage remain ideals for a populace disillusioned by a distant, worldly papal curia and, closer to home, by a mass mortality of friends and family? In his account of Trecento religious history, Giovanni Miccoli, like Cracco, also sees a crisis between inner spiritual yearning and institutional response. St. Francis could reconcile his inner evangelical calling with his obedience to Rome, but this became difficult in the Trecento.² Not surprisingly the cult of the merciful Virgin filled a void for believers confronted by an image of a judgmental Christ.³ The mendicant orders produced a variety of pious writings in the vernacular to broaden and deepen religious education of the laity, focusing on the centrality of confession.⁴ Pastoral discourse tended to stabilize religious worship with the goal of preserving the existing hierarchical structures in society and Church. As a consequence a religious formalism came to dominate thinking and practice, and this formalism, in its effort to restrain spiritual striving within an ordered set of conventions, may have defeated heretical threats, yet it failed to address the growing diversity of spiritual problems that people were experiencing. There remained an abiding uncertainty over the timing of one's death and the assurance of one's salvation.⁵

Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio were not unmoved by this crisis. Petrarch supported Cola di Rienzo's attempt to restore Rome to its spiritual and secular pre-eminence, and examined his

² See Antonio Rigon's review of Miccoli's history: "La 'storia religiosa' di Giovanni Miccoli da Francesco d'Assisi alla fine del Quattrocento," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 31 (1995): 359–366, especially 361.

³ Miccoli, "La storia religiosa" in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi 1974), 431–1079, especially 827–830.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 799–800.

⁵ Rigon, review of Miccoli, 362–363; Miccoli, "La storia religiosa," 842–849 and 887. See Miccoli's statement on 843: "È atrocemente grigia, in termini di vita sociale, la proposta religiosa presente nei predicatori, nei moralisti, nei direttori spirituali del Trecento e del Quattrocento; c'è uno spreco, verrebbe voglia di dire, di tensione emotiva, di promovimento di dedizione sentimentale e di slancio individuale, che restano però ingabbiati in una cornice prefissata, chiusa, limitata dalla autorità e dalle gerarchie dominanti."

own religious doubts, especially after Cola's failure.⁶ Petrarch's attack against the Avignon Curia, Miccoli notes, "constitutes only the tip of a critical discourse and a psychological and cultural detachment much more vast and diffuse. . . ."⁷ He corresponded with many clerical friends, not only to seek out classical manuscripts, but also to express his piety and cultural aspirations.⁸ But he retained an ambivalent stance toward the eremitic life, valuing its community while remaining aloof.⁹ Petrarch gives voice to his own inner disquiet; while admitting his vanity, he sought public recognition as a poet.¹⁰ Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in Miccoli's view, also characterizes a "psychological detachment," especially from the world of clerical hypocrisy and lay credulity. Responding to the spiritual ferment of the Trecento the *Decameron* evinces an independent attitude toward values and moral principles.¹¹ In general the humanists at this time, Miccoli writes, developed an autonomous way of thinking that still complemented the Christian tradition; they strove to secure personal intellectual freedom without challenging the dominant political and social structures.¹²

This current study analyzes how the response of Petrarch and Boccaccio to the religious crisis of the mid-Trecento went beyond feelings of detachment, discontent with Church government, or ridicule of hypocritical clergy. Throughout the High and Later Middle Ages many people, both orthodox and heretical, were aggrieved by the immorality of the Church hierarchy, and some, such as the Goliard poets or certain troubadours, pointed the weapons of satire against it.¹³

⁶ Gregorio Penco, *Storia della chiesa in Italia*, vol. 1 (Milan: Jaca Book, 1977), 421–422, 456.

⁷ Miccoli, "La storia religiosa," 875: "La curia avignonese divenne molto largamente, nella propaganda e nella trattativa del tempo, sinonimo di corruzione e di degenerazione, esempio tipico di avidità e fiscalismo: l'aggressività della polemica di un Francesco Petrarca costituisce solo la punta di un discorso critico e di un distacco psicologico e culturale molto più vasti e diffusi. . . ."

⁸ Anna Maria Voci, *Petrarca e la vita religiosa: il mito umanista della vita eremitica* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1983), 24–25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰ Penco, *Storia della chiesa*, 463.

¹¹ Miccoli, "La storia religiosa," 880–883: the *Decameron* exhibits "un distacco psicologico e umano da quel mondo di frati ipocriti e di gente credulona" (880).

¹² *Ibid.*, 884. Miccoli overestimates Boccaccio's sense of his own "superiorità intellettuale" and faith in human intelligence, in part by interpreting the narrative voices in the *Decameron* as Boccaccio's own (881, 883).

¹³ See Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400–1400* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), 200–202, 204–205, 245–252. A bitter anti-clerical

The reaction of these humanists, however, forged a path different from the traditional ones coursed by anti-clerical critics. Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio charted the human capacity to know, especially to know one's self, in light of its errant, fluctuating character. They were therefore intensely interested in the philosophical questions concerning the relation between appearance and reality and the issue of moral freedom. For the self never remained a fixed object of study, and the perceiver himself was involved in the permutations of time. The vicissitudes of one's emotional state affected one's apprehension. Even the desire for certain knowledge could beguile the mind. The traditional moral verities must be weighed in the cognizance of time's power, with the consequence that their ecclesiastical spokesmen were also viewed as historical personages, fully human and temporal, with particular biographies. The matrix of time and history underlying all human endeavor, including the practice of moral assertion, opened up a space for the humanists' free, critical appraisal of the moralities of their time, specifically those proclaimed by the Church. Yet this appraisal was not predicated on the relativity of moral truths. These truths remained absolute. The transcendent radiance of these truths in fact illuminated the temporal, historical character of human inquiry into the *summum bonum*, for it revealed how one viewed these truths in an inconstant, fluctuating way.

In embarking upon this philosophical exploration, Petrarca and Boccaccio therefore developed a profound sense of paradox and irony. Among the paradoxes they discovered were the following: the self that changes and yet persists over time; the awareness of self-deception; the individual's validation of authority; and the ethics of pleasure. These paradoxes entailed a deeper feeling for irony than one traditionally practiced in the fourteenth century. Irony went beyond the Ciceronian concept of dissembling, of pretending what one is not, or its connotation of mockery, or its quality of wit. It conveys a more deeply Socratic sense, in which one's ignorance is both feigned and genuine, since it is more self-aware than that of one's interlocutor.¹⁴ Paradox and irony provided a sense of exciting

satirist among the troubadours is Peire Cardenal: see Frederick Goldin, ed. and trans., *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouveres* (New York: Anchor, 1973), 285–309.

¹⁴ Dilwyn Knox's *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Views on Irony* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), ch. 6–8, provides valuable information on this concept during the Renaissance, but his examination is largely limited by his search for explicit references to Socratic

insecurity, whereby the study of life pushed one farther into an arena of uncertainty and greater scepticism.

By articulating these paradoxes as central to the human condition the humanists announced, for this historical moment, a new relationship between author and reader, speaker and audience. For paradox, with its inherent ambiguities, drew the reader into a personal interpretation of the text. The humanist writings showed their readers different ways of looking at life's experiences, for which a single, univocal dictum, characteristic of the preacher, no longer sufficed. The pronounced subjectivity of their expression, often employing the form of dialogue or of an individual, flawed persona, engaged the reader's own personality in a way which required the reader to summon his particular experience and then to understand its limitations.

irony, rather than an examination of the ironic practice. Thus when he notes that Petrarch's letter to Giacomo Colonna discusses *ironia socratica* [*Fam.* II.9.19] and thereby "appropriately symbolizes the reintroduction of the concept to Western literature and philosophy" (100), he regards Petrarch's use of it as a form of humor. Knox also examines Boccaccio's biographical sketch of Socrates in his *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia* (IV.1 § 259–274, ed. Giorgio Padoan [Milan: Mondadori, 1965], 1:233–238), asserting that Boccaccio does not refer to Socratic irony (98), and instead attributes his treatment of the Socratic "I know that I do not know" to an emphasis on humility (126). Yet Boccaccio does cite examples of Socrates's ironic commentary, e.g. § 264. Knox indeed mentions, without elaboration, both Petrarch and Boccaccio's use of *antiphrasis* as a form of irony (158, 160). A treatment of irony in the *Decameron* that relies in good measure on Knox's study is provided by Carlo Delcorno's chapter on "Ironia/parodia" in *Lessico critico decameriano*, ed. Renzo Bragantini and Pier Massimo Forni (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), 162–191. For a more subtle reference to Petrarch's irony, see Riccardo Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization from Petrarch to Valla*, trans. Margaret King (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), 75–76 and note 36 (pp. 225–226), and Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP, 1993), 83, where he relates "Socrates' ironic perspective," valued by Petrarch, to Petrarch's scepticism. For Boccaccio's irony, see Erich Auerbach's appreciation in his comments on *Decameron* IV.2 in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 193–194.

Petrarch expresses a melancholy appreciation of Socratic ignorance in his *On Religious Leisure*: "[sileo] cecitatem anime seipsam nescientis, ridiculam ignorantiam rerum variarum et scientiam laboriosam, magis in dies sibi desit agnoscentem et profectu notitiae causas laboris ac doloris et indignationis aggregantem." *Il "de otio religioso" di Francesco Petrarca*, ed. Giuseppe Rotondi (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1958) 37.5–8; *On Religious Leisure*, ed. and trans. Susan Schearer (New York: Italica Press, 2002) 56: "[I am silent about] the very blindness of the soul's ignorance of itself, our ridiculous lack of knowledge of all sorts of matters, and our laborious quest for that knowledge which realizes more every day what it lacks and which, because of the increase of knowledge, accumulates more reasons for labor, grief, and unworthiness."

The medium of this engagement between the humanists and their readers was the poetic. For Petrarch and Boccaccio, the poetic realm was intimately associated with the philosophical. In his late letter to posterity, Petrarch notes how he was especially inclined to moral philosophy and poetry.¹⁵ His *Invective Against a Physician* [*Invective contra medicum*] stresses that the Muses belonged to both poetry and philosophy: Aristotle wrote on Homer, and Cicero translated him.¹⁶ The poet's calling consists in more than writing in meter; it understands the nature of things.¹⁷ Writing in the *Familiars*, Petrarch sees Virgil "conscious of the secrets of nature," especially of the passions.¹⁸

As Ronald Witt has observed, it was in the discipline of grammar or poetry, not rhetoric, that humanists began their pursuit of classical *vetustas*, and they exhibited this pursuit not only in verse but also in prose, especially in the genre of the personal letter.¹⁹ Accordingly the first biographers of Petrarch and Boccaccio identified them as *poetae*.²⁰ In Boccaccio's own references to his friend and teacher, he

¹⁵ "Ingenio fui aequo potius quam acuto, ad omne bonum et salubre studium apto, sed ad morale praecipue philosophiam et ad poeticam pronum." Francesco Petrarca, *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al. (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1955), 6.

¹⁶ *Invective contra medicum* (§119) in: Francesco Petrarca, *Invectives*, ed. and trans. David Marsh (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003), 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §115 (94).

¹⁸ *Fam.* II.5.3: "secretorum nature conscius poeta," in reference to *Aen.* VI.730–734; cited by Klaus Heitmann, *Fortuna und Virtus: Eine Studie zu Petrarca's Lebensweisheit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1958), 126. All English translations, unless noted otherwise, are mine.

¹⁹ *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 93: "To emphasize the relationship of rhetoric to law is to suppose that humanism was in its early stages a rhetorical movement, a supposition which overlooks its orientation toward poetry from the 1260s until late in the following century. . . . Despite its eventual and gradual penetration of other literary genres, creative imitation occurred first in poetry"; 265: "[Petrarch] was restoring the conception of the private letter as a freewheeling vehicle for communicating the writer's feelings and thoughts, a concept lost with the triumph of the *ars dictaminis*; and he was forging a new language to that end." Petrarch connects poetry to Grammatica in the *Contra medicum* §118 (96).

²⁰ Angelo Solerti, ed., *Le vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio scritte fino al secolo decemosesto* (Milan: F. Vallardi, 1904–1905), on Petrarch: Boccaccio (253–264), Bonaventura de Padua (273–274), Filippo Villani (275–281), Giannozzo Manetti (680); on Boccaccio: Filippo Villani (671–676), Domenico Bandini (677–678), Manetti (680). Giannozzo Manetti's citations of Petrarch and Boccaccio as poets can also be found in Giannozzo Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, ed. and trans. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Rolf Bagemihl (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003), 4–5 and 86–87. From this last passage Manetti's sense of poetic progression deserves citation: Boccaccio was "egregius sui temporis poeta, ita Petrarcae in poetica successisse visus est, ut ipse Dante paulo ante successerat. . . . In hac itaque vicissitudinaria horum praestantium poetarum successione, huiusmodi acerrima eorum ingenia ideo iisdem pene temporibus ex ipsa natura pullalasse arbitrator. . . ." In the editors' translation: "Giovanni Boccaccio,

cites Petrarch's poetic ability "in prose and verse."²¹ Giannozzo Manetti asserts that Boccaccio, as a poet, surpassed Dante and Petrarch in vernacular prose composition.²²

Modern scholars, such as Ugo Mariani and Charles Trinkaus, have maintained this appellation of "poet," and have initiated the inquiry into its philosophical implications.²³ As Trinkaus writes:

an excellent poet of his time, seems to have succeeded Petrarch in poetry the way the latter succeeded Dante. . . . I believe this succession of distinguished poets to be the work of nature herself, which caused those extraordinary geniuses to flourish around the same time. . . ."

²¹ Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari: Laterza, 1951), 2:763 [XV.6]: "Quem non dicam Ytali omnes, quorum singulare et perenne decus est, sed et Gallia omnis atque Germaniia, et remotissimus orbis angulus, Anglia, Grecique plures poetam novere precipuum; nec dubito, quin usque Cyprum et ad aures usque tue sublimatatis nomen eius inclita fama detulerit. Huius enim iam multa patent opera et metrica et prosaica, memoratu dignissima, certum de celesti eus ingenio testimonium hinc inde ferentia. Stat enim, exitum cupiens, adhuc sub conclavi clausa, divina Affrica . . . stat Buccolicum carmen, iam ubique sua celebritate cognitum; stat et liber Epistularum ad amicos metrico scriptarum stilio; stant preterea ingentia duo Epistularum prosaicarum volumina, tanta sententiarum, tanta rerum gestarum copia, tanto ornato artificio splendentium, ut in nullo Ciceronianis postponendas eas censeat lector equus; stant in medicum Invective; stat Solitarie vite liber, et, qui paucis post diebus in lucem novissimus venturus est, De remediis ad utramque fortunam." Charles Osgood, ed. and trans., *Boccaccio on Poetry* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 115–116: "His great eminence as a poet has been recognized by—I will not say merely all Italians, for their glory is singular and perennial—but by all France, and Germany, and even that most remote little corner of the world, England; and, I must add, many of the Greeks. Surely his great fame has reached Cyprus, and hence the ears of your Highness. Many memorable works from his hand in prose and verse yield patent proof to all the world of his heaven-sent genius. First is his divine poem *Africa*. . . . Second, is his *Bucolics*, famous the world over. Third, the book of metrical epistles to his friends. Fourth are the two great volumes of letters in prose, so replete with thought and fact, so resplendent with artistic embellishment, that no fair-minded reader would judge them in any respect inferior to Cicero's. Fifth are his *Invectives against a Physician*. Sixth his book *On the Solitary Life*. Last is the one which will see the light in a few days—his book *On the Remedies of Fortune*."

²² Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, 104–105: "Ceterum Boccaccio ita paene in omnibus prestat ut in paucis admodum ac levibus quibusdam, in graecarum scilicet litterarum cognitione, qua Dante omnino caruit, et in materna et soluta oratione, qua pauca scripsit, sibi cedere videantur. In quibus duobus dumtaxat etiam Petrarcam excelluit, cum ab eo tamquam a praeceptore suo in ceteris omnibus vinceretur" ["Finally, Dante is superior to Boccaccio in almost everything, except for a few things of lesser importance, such as the knowledge of Greek letters, which Dante lacked completely, and the writing of prose works in the vernacular, which he did not practice often. Those two are the only things in which Boccaccio exceeded Petrarca, whereas in everything else he was surpassed by him, as a student by his teacher." Editors' translation]. As noted above, Manetti had cited Boccaccio as "egregius sui temporis poeta" (*ibid.*, 86).

²³ Ugo Mariani, *Il Petrarca e gli Agostiniani* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1946), 29–30; Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

It is likely that Petrarch understood classical philosophy better through Vergil [*sic*] and Horace than through the philosophers he came to know, which suggests that his grasp of ancient philosophy was more characteristically that of a poet than that of a historian. It also suggests that it was possibly through the medium of his poetic understanding of ancient thought that he was incited to conceive and fulfill the roles of both rhetorician and moral philosopher. . . . To say that Petrarch thought philosophically as a poet is not to minimize his importance as a philosopher but to point out his unique mode of thinking. . . .²⁴

For Trinkaus Petrarch's "mode of thinking" entailed subjectivity,²⁵ but he does not examine the formal varieties of this mode and their philosophical implications. The humanists' writings present different *personae* and other stylistic qualities; be they comedic or grave, these qualities refract and color their writings' ethical message. In Petrarch's early work, *On Things Worthy of Remembrance* [*Rerum memorandarum libri*], he recognizes how even a comic writer such as Publilius Syrus could express ideas "so solemnly and so splendidly, so that they seem to be gleaned from the sources of philosophy."²⁶ Boccaccio, with good

²⁴ *Poet as Philosopher*, 2; see also Trinkaus's *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 1:50: "Petrarch is an anti-rationalist and a semi-sceptic, but also a rhetorician and man of faith. It is easy for him to be full of inconsistent statements because logical consistency has no value for him. However, there is consistency in these positions and particularly with the life of man in the fourteenth century as he experienced and structured it with appropriate images. In the final analysis he was a poet." See also Sarah Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 140: "Despite his occasional disparaging comments concerning his vernacular poems, it is the collection of the *Rime sparse* that fully justifies the self-definition of his *Letter to Posterity*, that he is at once both poet and moral philosopher."

²⁵ *Poet as Philosopher*, 2-3.

²⁶ *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. Giuseppe Billanovich (Florence: Sansoni, 1943) III.91.1, p. 177: "Huius [namely Publilius's] equidem inter mimos multa tam graviter tamque magnifice dicta sunt, ut e mediis philosophiae fontibus eruta videantur. . . ." The passage confirms and elaborates upon Seneca's statement to Lucilius, *Ep.* 8.8: "Quam multi poetae dicunt, quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda! . . . Quantum disertissimorum versuum inter mimos iacet!" [How many ideas have poets expressed that have been said or should be said by philosophers! . . . How many wise verses lie buried among the comic plays!].

Petrarch would follow this idea in a letter to his brother Gherardo from 1352, in which he declared that poets may be classed among the ethical philosophers, for they too might heal the soul: *Fam.* X.5.10-13: "Etsi enim ego corpori prosit vis in terra nascentium herbarum, etsi animo affecto ac languico multi verborum medicamenta confecerint atque conscripserint, utriusque tamen hominis vera salus a Deo est. Horum sane qui animis medentur, quidam unius hominis, quidem familie,

humor, takes his moral critics to task, defending his address to women in the *Decameron* by citing the story of Filippo Balducci, who tries to protect his son from erotic desire by calling women “goslings”: “Their bills,” the father says, “are not where you think, and require a special sort of diet.” Balducci’s efforts however are as vain as those of the *Decameron*’s critics: “But no sooner had he spoken than he realized his wits were not match for Nature.”²⁷ These poetic features of persona, tone and voice in the humanist writings allowed for shifts in perspective on the part of both author and reader, in accord with the humanists’ awareness of human inconstancy: “We may hold one view of a question in the morning, and another in the evening,” Petrarch writes in his *Invective*. “Indeed, one and the same mind will hold different views in the same instant.”²⁸

By employing the poetic realm in their philosophical investigation, the humanists conceived human perspective as qualified by temporality, subjectivity, and emotion. They held at ironical distance the claims of universal wisdom, such as those asserted by the clergy. Bringing forth the experiential and the existential as the formative modality of ethical awareness, the paradoxes developed by the humanists led them into confrontation with ecclesiastical writers, especially the Dominicans, who were urgently revising and shoring up the traditions of the Church. The humanist views clashed with those of

quidam reipublicae curam gerunt: primum quidem ethice opus est, yconomice secundum, tertio politice magistri et legum latores invigilant. Inque his omnibus vie tercie tramitibus sunt qui palam, sunt qui clam pergant et velut apertum evitantes umbris gaudeant, neque se profanari et nimia familiaritate contemni, sed videri a paucis et studio queri velint. Hi sunt poete, nostra presertim etate rarum genus, in quibus ipsis non omnibus idem finis, non eadem via, ut non immerito cum virile hoc et magnificum vatum genus magno semper in precio fuerit, illud humiliius stiloque mollius severis infamie iudicibus habeatur.”

²⁷ *Dec.* IV.intro.23, 29: “‘Elle si chiamano papere. . . [T]u non sai donde elle s’imbeccano’ e senti incontanente piú aver di forza la natura che il suo ingegno.” The translation is by G.H. McWilliam, *The Decameron*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), 287. Boccaccio tells his critics that opposing “the laws of nature” may be not only futile but even harmful: IV.intro.41: “. . . io conosco che altra cosa che dir non potrà alcuno con ragione, se non che gli altri e io che v’amiamo, naturalmente operiamo; alle cui leggi, cioè della natura, voler contrastare troppo gran forze bisognano, e spesse volte non solamente invano ma con grandissimo danno del faticante s’adoperano.” All original language citations from the *Decameron* are from the third edition by Vittore Branca, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992).

²⁸ *Invective contra medicum* §205 (174–175): “. . . unde sepe accidit, ut de una eadem re aliud mane, aliud sero, imo et in eodem instanti nunc hoc nunc illud uni et eidem ingenio videatur.” Ed. trans.

their mendicant contemporaries, in the moment of the Church's vulnerability, molding the early Renaissance in ways that would persist in the later formulations of Cusanus, Alberti, Valla, and Erasmus, even as in other venues humanism retreated within the academy and became less creative and dynamic. In fact the philosophical change wrought by the fourteenth-century humanists was revolutionary, and its unconventional nature, shaped in part by the experience of exile, would frame its critical if contested place in the development of Renaissance philosophy.

In the field of literary commentary, scholars have explored how the work of Petrarch and Boccaccio is related to a classical—medieval tradition of letters, and especially to Dante, the “first crown” of Florence.²⁹ A number of them, such as Giuseppe Mazzotta, Giuseppe

²⁹ The literature is vast, and these works cited here provide a starting point for further exploration. Robert Durling, in his introduction to his edition and translation of *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1976), sees in the *Canzoniere* a “profoundly original” treatment of traditional poetic themes, including the stress on the temporal nature of experience (9–10); thus in contrast to Dante, Petrarch creates in his collection a fragmentary sense of one's life and work, as his poetry is unable to overcome time's passage (17, 26). Sarah Sturm-Maddox has emphasized how, unlike Dante, Petrarch's poet does not escape his forest of emotional confusion. Petrarch transforms the courtly sense of the persecution of the lover by Amor with his wounding by Laura, and therefore never frees himself from his infatuation, as Dante does with respect to Beatrice (*Petrarch's Laurels*, University Park, Penn.: Penn State UP, 1992, 84–100, 120–122, 194–201; see also her *Petrarch's Metamorphoses*, 127–140). Ugo Dotti (*Storia della letteratura italiana*, Bari: Laterza, 1991), cites Petrarch's originality in the genre of lyric poetry, in comparison to the provençal, Sicilian and stilnovist traditions, as consisting in the vernacular translation of Christian and classical moral-philosophical issues (78–87). Marco Santagata sees in the very collection of a *libro di versi*, with its narrative form, a departure not only from Sicilian and stilnovist traditions, but also from didactic literature. Petrarch's lyric verses respond to the crisis of poetry in the mid-Trecento, when poetry had lost its preeminence as a didactic genre and its sense of regional *scuole*. There is no specific audience for the *Canzoniere*; its “P” is autobiographical, not representative of a particular class (*Dal sonetto al Canzoniere*, 2nd ed., Padua: Liviana, 1989, 157–176; *I frammenti dell'anima*, Bologna: Mulino, 1992, 27–38; 111–117). Santagata's ideas on Petrarch's departure from tradition are favorably reviewed by Enrico Fenzi in his *Saggi Petrarqueschi* (Florence: Cadmo, 2003): “Sull'edizione del *Canzoniere* commentata da Santagata,” 165–182. Fenzi emphasizes the intellectual nature of Petrarch's poetry, its self-confident approach to existing literary conventions, and its central place in Petrarch's ethical investigations: “Ed anche e soprattutto la poesia, in quanto legata all dimensione intima del sentimento, ricava la sua luce da un personale modo di essere e in definitiva da una scelta di natura etica, che deve la sua esemplarità al fatto di essere realmente vissuta e sofferta come tale” (180). In the same collection see “Tra Dante e Petrarca: il fantasma di Ulisse,” 493–517.

With regard to Boccaccio, see Dotti, *Storia*, 98–107, where he summarizes the views of the *Decameron* as an earthly *Commedia*, and, citing Vittore Branca's phrase,

Velli, and Antonio Gagliardi, have addressed how the humanists' writings, in both Latin and the vernacular, verse and prose, may

an *epopea mercantile* [Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul 'Decameron'*, 7th ed., Milan: Sansoni 1996, 134–164]. Boccaccio's sense of fortune in the *Decameron*, according to Dotti, has no effect on one's moral condition, unlike the medieval pessimistic view. As for the *Decameron's* place in the literary tradition, Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer (*Boccaccio und der Beginn der Novelle*, Munich: W. Fink, 1969) has argued that Boccaccio introduced the literary genre of the novella, while other scholars have claimed that Boccaccio provided primarily its "fondazione teorica" and "codificazione" in the *Decameron* (Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, Rome: Salerno, 2000, 133–138, citation 135). The *Decameron* reveals Boccaccio's love for playful experimentation, and, with regard to its sources, "l'assoluta indifferenza del libro di novelle a qualunque rigorosa sistemazione ideologica o intenzione normativa: esso si propone piuttosto come fedele registrazione dal mondo così com'è e dell'infinitamente contraddittorio gioco della forze che interagiscono nella storia" (*ibid.*, 169; see also her "Exemplum e novella" in: *Letteratura in forma de sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli xiii–xvi*, ed. Ginetta Auzzas, Giovanni Baffetti, and Carlo Delcorno, Florence: Olschki, 2003, 281–299, especially 284–285). Renzo Brangantini and Pier Massimo Forni's edition of the *Lessico critico decameroniano* contain references *passim* to Boccaccio's relation to literary tradition, organized under different subjects. The chapter on "Fonti" by Costanzo Di Girolamo and Charmaine Lee (142–161) assesses Boccaccio's creative and eclectic procedure in composing the *Decameron*, especially in relation to the *fabliaux*. Similar to Petrarch's literary analysts, scholars find in the work a "temporalizzazione e problematizzazione di generi più antichi" (148). Boccaccio's innovation therefore lies in the combination of literary styles, and particularly in the tension between the *Decameron's* stories and their rubrics, between the narratives and the narrators' intentions, as well as in the parodic reversals of the sources Boccaccio adapts in the work (Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 171–173). Walter Haug has singled out the self-consciousness of the *Decameron* narrator and the place of the *comice* in framing the stories as "la differenza fondamentale ed epocale" ("La problematica dei generi nelle novelle di Boccaccio: la prospettiva di un medievista" in: *Autori e lettori di Boccaccio: Atti del Convegno internazionale di Certaldo 20–22 settembre 2001*, ed. Michelangelo Picone (Florence: F. Cesati, 2002), 127–140, citation 138).

As for Boccaccio's relation to Dante, see the comments and overview by Robert Hollander in his *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. Boccaccio in Hollander's view is the "Italian Ovid," employing the means of satire as he read Dante, the "Italian Virgil" (13–14). Claudette Perrus has explored how Boccaccio critiques the myths found in Dante's work by his analysis of their historical foundation ("Riscritture dantesche fra *Decameron* e *Esposizioni* in: *Autori et lettori*, 277–288). Along these lines Anita Simon has emphasized the way in which the *Decameron* re-situates its sources in a new concrete sense of time and place, a sense vividly comprehensible to his contemporaries: "... la fantasia del novelliere ha utilizzato dati derivanti dalla tradizione letteraria e li ha rinnovati ponendoli entro coordinate di spazio e di tempo ben definite, appartenenti a una realtà economica, strettamente contemporanea, e immediatamente comprensibile da gran parte del suo pubblico, di fiorentini 'mercadanti in terra di Soldano'" ("Novellistica e storia nel medioevo: una proposta di lettura (*Dec.* II 7)" in *Favole Parabole Istorie: Le forme della scrittura novellistica dal medioevo al rinascimento: Atti del Convegno di Pisa 26–28 ottobre 1998*, ed. Gabriella Albanese, Lucia Battaglia Ricci, and Rosella Bessi, Rome: Salerno, 2000, 223–230, citation 230).

Chaucer studies have also shed light on the *Decameron's* innovations. See David Wallace's *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio* (Dover, New Hampshire: D.S.

reflect the philosophical systems of Stoicism and Averroes.³⁰ Yet there has been little discussion about the relation between the humanists and the mid-Trecento clergy. Examining this historical context, we discover a deeper significance to the humanist writings in terms of their philosophical import. Our findings engage the observations of scholars of literature, and provide a different dimension for understanding the humanists' work. This work, in its formal complexity, announces a new episode not only in the history of literature, but also in the history of ideas.

We must therefore mine the nexus between philosophy and poetry that was central to the humanist inquiry. Over the last half-century, scholarship on humanism, however, has debated whether humanist writers significantly altered the history of philosophy. While Eugenio Garin maintains that the humanists through their philology created a new philosophical method and inquired into the nature of moral freedom, Paul Oskar Kristeller denies that this philology contributed much to philosophical thinking. Kristeller cites the continuation of scholastic thinking and Aristotelianism throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a tradition that the rhetorical practices of humanism hardly challenged.³¹ In Anglo-American scholarship Kristeller's

Brewer, 1985), 97, and more importantly his *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 62, 125–126, 147–149, and 162–163, where he argues for Boccaccio's portrayal of a self-regulating city-state. N.S. Thompson ascribes to the *Decameron* an ethical purpose in *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 138–161, 318 and “a very precise feeling for history” in “Local Histories: Characteristic Worlds in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*” in L.M. Koff and B.D. Schildgen, ed., *The 'Decameron' and the 'Canterbury Tales': New Essays on an Old Question* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2000), 85–101, citation 87). Of interest are two studies by Robin Kirkpatrick: “The Wake of the *Commedia*: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*” in Piero Boitani, ed., *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 201–230; and *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare: A Study of Source, Analogue and Divergence* (London: Longman, 1995), 36: “. . . Boccaccio offers to Chaucer (who may resist it) a model in which the power of fiction—understood as both making and indeed as lying—is thoroughly investigated and enlisted for ultimately moral ends.”

³⁰ See Mazzotta, *Worlds of Petrarch*, ch. 4 and *The World at Play in Boccaccio's 'Decameron'* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 15; Giuseppe Velli, “Seneca nel 'Decameron,' *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 168 (1991): 321–334, esp. 330–333 (reprinted in his *Petrarca e Boccaccio: tradizione, memoria, scrittura*, 2nd ed., Padua: Antenore, 1995, 209–221); and Antonio Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio: Poeta, Filosofo, Averroista* (Cantazaro: Rubbettino, 1999).

³¹ Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 4–7, 19–25 (re: Petrarch); Kristeller,

view largely predominates; on the continent, Ernesto Grassi has seconded Garin's contention of humanism's philosophical dimension.³² Between the two schools there is agreement that humanists expressed interest in issues of moral philosophy. The dispute is over the intensity and influence of this interest. Kristeller emphasizes a systematic, metaphysical program as characteristic of philosophical thought. Garin contends that the unsystematic inquiry of the humanists was also philosophical. As manifested in their choosing Plato over Aristotle, the humanists showed, in Garin's words, "a preference for the conception of an open world, discontinuous and full of contradictions, incessantly changing and hostile to any kind of systematization."³³

Like Garin, Charles Trinkaus has also advocated overcoming the separation of humanist rhetoric and poetry from philosophy. He views both Petrarch and Boccaccio as proclaiming "moral philosophies" that could reconcile the belief in divine Transcendence with a claim for individual autonomy. The humanists' rhetorical approach to philosophical issues led them to express their view in a situational, conditional way akin to that of the Sophists, and their poetic self-conception encouraged them to treat their own personal experiences as emblematic of the human condition.³⁴ Both Trinkaus and Garin underline the philosophical dimension of the early humanist enterprise, although Garin sees this dimension as rooted in a new philology and as essentially secular in outlook; Trinkaus by contrast reads their

"Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance" in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources* (New York: Harper, 1979), 85–105, especially 90–92, 99.

³² See Robert Black, "Humanism" in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 7:243–277, esp. 246–251; Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism: Studies in Philosophy and Poetics* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1988) and with Maristella Lorch *Folly and Insanity in Renaissance Literature* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986).

³³ Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 10.

³⁴ *The Poet as Philosopher*, 2, 22, 25–26, 111–112, 125–26, 134–135. The last passage deserves citation: "While we may well think of the contribution of Petrarch, Boccaccio and other humanists to the culture of the Renaissance as primarily literary, historical and moral, we are obscuring by those adjectives the deeply philosophical and theological character of this culture. . . . [I]n the world of Latin culture [discovered by Petrarch], philosophy was transformed into the *magistra vitae*, thus transcending the strictness and formalism of the Old Academy and the Peripatetics. Moral philosophy, concerned with affecting the will toward the attainment of goodness, was nonetheless genuine philosophy, though its premises may well have been Protagorean and rhetorical. Such also were the ingredients of humanism. . . ." Trinkaus is not always consistent in his terminology, for example when he states that Petrarch separates "rhetoric and a theology of faith from philosophy" (50).

work through a double lens of a theology of *sola gratia* and a modified Stoicism.³⁵

Neither Garin nor Trinkaus, however, integrates into his view the self-reflective and often self-critical character of these writings. As Petrarch remarks to his brother Gherardo and his fellow Carthusians in *On Religious Leisure* [*De otio religioso*]:

Therefore I shall write; and if it is not important to you to hear something as it were “new” from my pen, derived from the place where you for a long time now live your lives according to a deeply-rooted habit, nonetheless it is important for me that such things be said if they can be, and if I may both hear and heed what I myself say and not fall ill with the common malady of preachers: to be talkative and deaf at the same time.³⁶

This character of pronounced subjectivity is conveyed in both form and content and requires the reader to undertake a more qualified interpretation of their works. The rhetoric of their humanism is expressed through various *personae*. Even the poet, pushed by time and passion, puts himself forward for the reader’s analysis.³⁷ The “moral philosophies” expressed by Petrarch and Boccaccio are therefore inextricably involved in epistemological and ontological issues. If Garin, not unlike Trinkaus, correctly conceives the humanist vision of the cosmos as “incessantly changing and hostile to any kind of systematization,”³⁸ one must bring this conception into relation with

³⁵ See Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 25: “The new philosophy was born on the plane of morality and owes its existence to the sharp contrast between nature and humanity—or between fate and *fortuna* and virtue.” Trinkaus, *Poet as Philosopher*, 134: “In Petrarch’s and Boccaccio’s moral philosophies divine purpose and human motivations could function side by side, and they could be reconciled as men of many sorts moved by their own powers toward a more self-consciously moral and noble existence.” It is hard to see this as a lesson of the *Decameron*, for reasons discussed in detail below. It appears mostly derived from Trinkaus’s interpretation of the *Secretum*, 57–71 and his view on how Petrarch read classical philosophy, 22–26. Both Petrarch’s *Secretum* and conception of classical philosophy will be addressed in the course of this study.

³⁶ Petrarch, *De otio religioso*, p. 2, lines 16–20: “Scribam ergo; et si vestra non intersit id ex me ceu novum aliquid audire, unde iam pridem radicatum vobis habitum comparastis, mea tamen interest si fieri possit talia loqui, si forte loquentem ipse me audiam exaudiamque, neque, qui comunis predicantium morbus est, loquax simul et surdus sim.”

³⁷ See Hanna Gray’s article on the rhetorical attributes of humanism, including the sense of dialogue, though her examples are from the Quattro- and Cinquecento: “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence” in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): 512–514.

³⁸ Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 10; Trinkaus, *Poet as Philosopher*, 114: “The fourteenth

any scholarly attempt to ascribe a consistent philosophical teaching to these writers. The deep formal and conceptual integrity of their writings declares how the process of reading and writing is marked by the passage of time and the oscillation of mood; the writings confront the reader with paradoxical problems prior to moral dicta. Yet this confrontation is its own philosophical statement, more akin to Heraclitus than to Plato.³⁹

While paradox has been associated with humanist writings, especially those of Petrarch,⁴⁰ the valence of these writings for the history of ideas only emerges when their works are read in relation to the most articulate moralists in Trecento Italy. As Petrarch suggests in his statement to Gherardo, these are the mendicant preaching orders, in particular the Dominicans. The mendicant friars engaged in an ambitious program to direct and console the consciences of their lay listeners. Their writings that have survived range from Latin encyclopedias to manuals for preachers to penitential handbooks and finally to expositions of dogma and morality in the vernacular. Working with great effort, these clergy embraced all means of expression in order to withstand those forces that would undermine the authority of the Church.

Among those examining the humanist *ethos*, Alberto Tenenti has contrasted humanists and ecclesiasts, in particular the separate ways they responded to the fact of death. He draws the sharpest distinction between Petrarch and the German Dominican Heinrich Suso (†1366):

century witnessed the beginning of a search for a new mode of reconciling heaven and earth, God and man. . . . Today . . . there is a scepticism toward the large and the metaphysical solution and preference for breaking down the problem into the concrete, the personal, the circumstantial. This attitude has created a receptivity toward the kinds of explorations made by the early humanists, particularly Petrarch and Boccaccio.”

³⁹ Marcel Françon has noted Petrarch's references to Heraclitus in the *De remediis utriusque fortune*, and speculated on the sources of his knowledge of the Ephesian: “Petrarch, Disciple of Heraclitus,” *Speculum* 11.2 (1936): 265–171.

⁴⁰ Rosalie Colie, in her *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966), says with regard to Petrarch's *Rime*: “As he recorded the ‘real’ Petrarca, growing thin and grey, he made an ideal Petrarca, a poet fabulous in his fidelity and endurance, remarkable even for his very reality” (87); Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982) discusses paradox explicitly in his description of “creative imitation” (39) and more obliquely in that of “heuristic imitation” (40–41), which simultaneously ‘advertises’ and ‘distances itself’ from its evoked literary antecedents. Teodolinda Barolini speaks of Petrarch's “paradoxical project” of “the collecting of fragments” in his *Canzoniere* or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*: “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*,” *Modern Language Notes* 104.1 (1989): 1–38, p. 4.

“Suso is a soul, Petrarch a man, composed also of a body, one which never would refrain from decay before its time, not even to save its companion [the soul].”⁴¹ Tenenti stresses the humanist focus on the immanence of life when he asserts that “[t]heir art of dying well [*ars moriendi*] was basically a new sense of time, of the value of the body as organism, and resolved itself in an ideal of the active life that no longer had the center of gravity in a realm outside that of earthly existence.”⁴² For Tenenti this new “center of gravity” was weighted by the reading of classical authors, whose works the humanists now found difficult to reconcile with Christian teachings. Petrarch’s pursuit of glory and beauty therefore never overcame or harmonized with his spiritual consciousness of guilt and fallenness.⁴³

While Tenenti rightly notes the humanist involvement with the experiential in contrast to the doctrinal approach of the clergy, he does not analyze the philosophical differences between the two groups. For the Trecento humanists the overwhelming fact of temporal, historical existence need not divert one’s quest for the divine; on the contrary, from the opposition between earthly and spiritual desire a dialectic emerges, which more precisely delineates the contours of both realms, human and divine. Furthermore, Tenenti does not study the writings of the clerical authors who more immediately encountered the early humanist viewpoint, namely those from Trecento Italy. The most prominent religious orders, the Augustinian, Franciscan, and Dominican, stood at variance from the humanist orientation, even as certain members of these orders supported the search for classical texts. A number of other clergy, religious and secular, corresponded with Petrarch and Boccaccio, but the mendicants provide the clearest context for the humanists’ philosophical innovations.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alberto Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l’amore della vita nel Rinascimento: Francia e Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957), 51–52: “Suso è un’anima, Petrarca un uomo, fatto anche di corpo e che non riterrà mai di doversene disfare prima di tempo, nemmeno per salvare la sua compagna.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, 81: “La loro arte di ben morire era in fondo il nuovo senso di tempo, del valore del corpo come organismo, e si risolvera in un ideale di vita attiva che non aveva più il centro di gravità al di fuori dell’esistenza terrestre.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25–35, 371–373. Salvatore Camporeale has criticized Tenenti’s reading of Suso and has emphasized in Suso’s thought the centrality of salvation, not death, as Tenenti asserted. But nonetheless Suso’s mysticism has a pathway marked by doctrine: “La vita mondana ripercorre un tracciato che nell’ottica del Susone, il Minnesänger del ‘tardo gotico,’ viene a delinearsi lungo una lenta durata d’una serie quasi infinita di stazioni dolorose.” The review of Tenenti’s book is found in *Memorie Domenicane* 1977–1978 (n.s. 8–9: 1994–1995): 439–450, citation 443.

⁴⁴ For an overview on this topic see Kristeller, “The Contribution of Religious

Among the religious orders the Augustinian friars may have had the closest ties to Petrarch and Boccaccio.⁴⁵ Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro was a mentor to both men. The copy of Augustine's *Confessions* that Dionigi gave Petrarch as a young man was in turn bequeathed by Petrarch shortly before his death to another Augustinian, Luigi Marsili.⁴⁶ During his youth in Naples Boccaccio drew upon Dionigi's guidance and his enthusiasm for Petrarch; in his will he donated his library to the Florentine Augustinian convent at Santo Spirito, where he

Orders to Renaissance Thought and Learning" in *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning*, ed. and trans. Edward Mahoney (Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP, 1974), 95–120, although Kristeller suggests that during the Trecento clergy were more opposed to humanist learning (108). Among other religious Pierre Bersuire deserves mention. A Benedictine in Avignon, he composed two moral encyclopaediae: the *Reductorium morale* (ca. 1340), a work in sixteen volumes that embraced natural phenomena, Ovid, and the Bible; and the *Repertorium morale* (1340–1359), an alphabetical arrangement and abridgement of the earlier work. He also translated into French three decades of Livy's *ab urbe condita* (Charles Samaran, *Pierre Bersuire, prieur de Saint-Eloi de Paris, 1290?–1362*, Paris 1962; Voci, *Petrarca e la vita religiosa*, 32–33). Bersuire visited Petrarch in Avignon, or possibly Vaucluse in 1338; Petrarch praises Bersuire in *Sen. XVI.7* (1373) as "religione et litteris vir insignis" (Samaran, 9). Bersuire mentions the *Africa* in his *Ovidius moralizatus*, volume 15 of the *Reductorium* (Samaran, 81; see also Enrico Fenzi's reference to this citation in his "Di alcuni palazzi, cupole e planetari nell'*Africa* del Petrarca" in *Saggi Petrarqueschi*, 232–233, 271–272). Samaran calls Bersuire's works medieval compilations (100); his moral view is traditional: "homo" is defined as "persona rationalis et iusta" (*Reductorium moralizatum super totam Bibliam*, Cologne: B. de Unkel, 1477, Hain 2797, f. 6rb); *caro* according to the author "nunquam cessat ludere insolenter et inhonesta se portare nisi forte ferro ratione et temperantie arceatur" (*Prima [-tertia] pars dictionarii [Repertorium morale]*, Lyon: J. Sachon, 1516, vol.1, f. 163r). Concerning Bersuire's style, Witt's remark is *apropos*: "When, as in the cases of Landolfo Colonna and his nephew Giovanni, we can compare the devotion to scholarship of learned Italians [in Avignon] to their actual writing, we find that their passion for philological research far exceeded any concern for stylistics" (*Footsteps*, 233).

⁴⁵ Kaspar Elm, "Mendikanten und Humanisten im Florenz des Tre- und Quattrocento" in: *Vitas fratrum: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Eremiten- und Mendikantenorden des zwölften und dreizehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Dieter Berg (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1994), 263–284, especially 270–271; also Émile van Moë, "Les Ermites de Saint-Augustin: Amis de Pétrarque" in *Melanges d'archéologie e d'histoire* 46 (1929): 258–280, Ugo Mariani, *Il Petrarca e gli Agostiniani*, and Rudolph Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden und der Beginn der humanistischen Bewegung* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1965); also printed in *Augustiniana* 14 (1964): 249–314, 603–639 and 15 (1965): 259–293.

⁴⁶ The gift is noted in Petrarch's *Familiares* IV.1 (to Dionigi) and *Seniles* XV.7 (to Marsili). See Mariani, *Petrarca e gli Agostiniani*, 79 and Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden*, 20–23; and also Giuseppe da Stefano, "Dionigi da Borgo S. Sepolcro, amico del Petrarca e maestro del Boccaccio," in *Atti della Accademia della Scienze di Torino* 96, classe 2 (1961–62): 272–314, especially 274–284. Petrarch also wrote *Fam.* IV.2 and *ep. metr.* I.4 to Dionigi, and eulogized him in *ep. metr.* I.13. Both these verse letters were copied by Boccaccio in his *Zibaldone Laurenziano*.

found a confessor in Martino da Signa.⁴⁷ The Paduan friar Bonaventura da Perugia delivered Petrarch's eulogy, in which he describes seeing the inspired humanist amid his study as a second Augustine.⁴⁸ In their work these Augustinians echoed and furthered the research of antiquity. Dionigi composed an influential commentary on Valerius Maximus, examining manuscript variants and attempting to understand the original sources in their historical context.⁴⁹ Both Petrarch and Boccaccio knew this commentary, and Boccaccio drew upon it in his later work.⁵⁰ Although Marsili wrote few works, he was praised for his learning and his teaching by the succeeding generations of Florentine humanists, including Salutati, Bruni, and Poggio.⁵¹

Yet in the field of moral thought the Augustinians adhered to orthodoxy. Their intellectual *praeceptor* Egidio Romano (†1316) retained Thomist-Aristotelian features in his metaphysics and epistemology, while developing a more affective theology, aimed at moving the will.⁵² The moral goals and obstacles addressed by the friars remained

⁴⁷ Mariani, *Petrarca e gli Agostiniani*, 70–73 and di Stefano, “Dionigi da Borgo S. Sepolcro,” 287–289.

⁴⁸ Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden*, 19–20, 119–120; see also Marsili's appraisal of Petrarch in a letter to Guido del Palagio, written September 1374 after Petrarch's death: “E per certo sola la sua presanza era sofficiente sprone a sospignere ogni animo verso camino di virtù, tante insieme raunate se ne vedeano i llui, che del parlare non dico: le scritture il possono chiaro mostrare, beneché lla viva boce molto risuona e ispezialmente in bocca del proprio autore, quando la vita comenda le parole.” Giovanni dalle Celle—Luigi Marsili, *Lettere*, ed. Francesco Giambonini (Florence: Olschki, 1991), 2:477.

⁴⁹ Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden*, 23–36; Mariani, *Petrarca e gli Agostiniani*, 48–49; with regard to Dionigi's inception of an “historico-critical attitude” among the Augustinians in his *Sentence* commentary, see Damasus Trapp, “Augustinian Theology of the 14th Century: Notes on Editions, Marginalia, Opinions and Book-Lore,” *Augustiniana* 6 (1956): 146–274; 156–160, and his “The *Quaestiones* of Dionysius de Burgo O.S.A.,” *Augustinianum* 3 (1963): 63–78.

⁵⁰ Di Stefano, “Dionigi da Borgo S. Sepolcro,” 289–313. The works in question are the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia* and the *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*.

⁵¹ See Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden*, 73–82, for references, and for his unconventional teaching methods of conversation and dialogue; and Simona Brambilla, *Itinerari nella Firenze di fine Trecento: Fra Giovanni dalle Celle e Luigi Marsili* (Milan: CUSL, 2002), 107–224. In his *Paradiso degli Alberti*, composed a number of years after Marsili's death, Giovanni Gherardi da Prato portrays Marsili as an enlightened figure who encouraged the education of women: Mariani, *Petrarca e gli Agostiniani*, 88–89.

⁵² Agostino Trapé, “Scuola theologica e spiritualità nell'Ordine Agostiniano” in *Sanctus Augustinus: vitae spiritualis magister: Settimana internazionale de spiritualità agostiniana: Roma 22–27 ottobre 1956* (Rome: Analecta Augustiniana [1956]), 2:5–75; Adolar Zumkeller, “Die Augustinerschule des Mittelalters: Vertreter und philosophisch-theologische Lehre,” *Analecta Augustiniana* 27 (1964): 167–262, especially 178–195;

traditional. Marsili wrote of the charms and evils of the world, which he escaped through religious *otium*, and advised the laity to confess their sins at least once a year to a priest as their “spiritual father.”⁵³ Simone Fidati da Cascia, the most famous Augustinian preacher of the time, sympathized with the call for radical poverty by the Spiritual Franciscans, reportedly defending them against the Florentine Dominicans.⁵⁴ But the appeal of radical poverty, and the anti-clerical charge it contained, had as its context the conventional ideas of voluntary withdrawal from the world and of overcoming the flesh.⁵⁵ True to his Church, Simone valued the moral superiority of the clergy.⁵⁶ Like other critics, including his Dominican contemporary Cavalca, Simone rebuked the clergy for failing to live up to the calling of their office.

Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità italiana*, vol.1 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978), 90. For the affective theology of the Franciscans, in particular John Peckham, see François-Xavier Putallaz, *Figure francescane alle fine del xiii secolo* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1996), 68.

⁵³ *Lettere*, 472–474; Cesare Vasoli, “La ‘Regola per ben confessarsi’ di Luigi Marsili,” *Rinascimento* 4 (1953): 39–44, citation 42: “Io mi rendo in cholpa a dDio e a voi sacerdote, suo vichario e mio spirituale padre. . . .”

⁵⁴ Marvin Becker, “Florentine Politics and the Diffusion of Heresy in the Trecento: A Socioeconomic Inquiry,” *Speculum* 34.1 (1959): 60–75, especially 68, and Mary McNeil, *Simone Fidati and his ‘de gestis Domini Salvatoris’* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1950), 30–31. Both Becker and McNeil cite the research of Felice Tocco: see his *Studi francescani* (Naples: F. Perrella, 1909), 412–413, 516–517. See also Marjorie Reeves, “Joachimist Expectations in the Order of Augustinian Hermits,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 25 (1958): 111–141, especially 118–121. The debate with the Dominicans supposedly took place in 1348, the year of Fidati’s death. For an appreciation of Fidati’s methodology in his sermons, see Carlo Delcorno, “La predicazione agostiniana (sec. XIII–XIV)” in *Gli Agostiniani a Venezia e la Chiesa di S. Stefano: Atti della giornata di studio nel V centenario della dedizione della chiesa di Santo Stefano*, ed. Bruno Zanettin (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1997), 87–108, especially 92–96.

⁵⁵ See Fidati’s “La vita christiana,” printed in Arrigo Levasti, ed., *Mistici del Duecento e Trecento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1935), I.10, p. 629, and I.16, p. 650: “Lá ove io dico, secondo la santa fede, che qualunque cosa o atto o costume o conversazione, sia che vuole che ti divelle dal mondo, che ti fa mortificare, che ti fa umiliare, avvillier, amar povertade, guardare da vizio, fae pronto lo spirito, raffrena la propria carne, accende desiderio di virtude a negare la propria volúntá, fatti venire in dispiacimento le cose visibili per le invisibili. . . .” The *incipit* to this work states that he composed it in Florence in 1333 (p. 607). Fidati was likely converted from profane studies by the Spiritualist Angelo Clareno: see McNeil, *Simone Fidati*, 9–13, and Ernesto Menestò’s entry on Fidati in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (afterwards *DBI*), vol. 47 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997), 406. See also Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità*, 91.

⁵⁶ “La vita christiana” II.2, p. 654: “. . . e ‘l prelato e il pastore si dee amare molto teneramente, però che sono in mezzo fra Iddio e noi. . . .”; II.5, p. 666 (regarding confession). See also Menestò, entry on Fidati, 408–409.

Both Petrarch and Boccaccio would re-define one's moral path in a way that varied from the Augustinian friars. An anonymous Trecento tract from the library of Santo Spirito recounted legends of St. Augustine as a pious hermit, an image that Petrarch would confront in the *Secretum*.⁵⁷ Riccardo Fubini has emphasized Petrarch's free-standing, critical assessment of classical and Christian tradition, in particular of Valerius Maximus, in contrast to Dionigi's more conventional praise of his worth as a moralist.⁵⁸

In addition to the Augustinians, the Franciscans have been studied as influences upon Petrarch's humanism. Francesco Sarri has traced Petrarch's acquaintance with the Order from his childhood to his support in 1369 for the embattled Minister General, Tommaso da Frignano.⁵⁹ On a thematic level, Hans Baron proclaimed Petrarch an "ally of the Franciscan spirit" for his praise of poverty, a virtue he could reconcile with his Stoic principles.⁶⁰ While the current study questions the identification of Petrarch's thinking with Stoic ideals, Baron is right to emphasize the issue of poverty for the Order, for it created the most contentious debates in the Trecento not only between Franciscans and other religious groups, but also among the Franciscans themselves.

Historians of the Friars Minor from Tocco to Roberto Lambertini have examined how the debate over poverty fractured the Order and led the Spiritual faction, which advocated absolute poverty, to criticize the Church, especially during the papacy's residence in

⁵⁷ The legend claimed that St. Augustine founded the order in Tuscany. Rudolph Arbesmann, "The 'Vita Aurelii Augustinii Episcopi' in Cod. Laurent. Plut. 80 Sup. 48," *Traditio* 18 (1962): 319–355; *idem*, "Mönchslegenden in mittelalterlichen Augustinusviten" in *Perennitas: Beiträge zur christlichen Archäologie und Kunst, zur Geschichte der Literatur, der Liturgie und des Mönchtums sowie zur Philosophie des Rechts und zur politischen Philosophie*, ed. Hugo Rahner and Emmanuel von Severus (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963), 91–104; *idem*, "A Legendary of Early Augustinian Saints," *Analecta Augustiniana* 29 (1966), 5–58; and M. de Kroon, "Pseudo-Augustin im Mittelalter," *Augustiniana* 22 (1972): 511–530.

⁵⁸ *Humanism and Secularization*, 47–54.

⁵⁹ "La francescanità del Petrarca," *Studi francescani* 14 (1928): 7–40, 235–253, 367–388.

⁶⁰ "Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth as Factors in the Rise of Humanistic Thought" in *Speculum* 13, no. 1 (1937), 1–37, citation 1; Baron revised and expanded this essay in *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 1:158–225. Baron sees these traits as evincing the "medievalism" of Petrarch's humanism compared to the civic modernism of Quattrocento thought.

Avignon.⁶¹ The Spirituals, as in the case of Simone Fidati, possessed great moral stature despite their official condemnation in 1317: they were moral scolds, adapting a Joachimite sense of historical decadence and renewal to the fact of their persecution, and decrying the decline of the Order through its urban ways and pursuit of sterile *scientia*.⁶² The reaction of the Spirituals to the ‘captivity in Babylon’ of the Avignon papacy may well have struck a chord in Petrarch’s mind, as reflected in his letters *Sine nomine* and his poetry, for example *Canz.* 137.⁶³

The writings of the Spirituals appealed to the leading Franciscan admirer of Petrarch, Tedaldo della Casa. Fra Tedaldo was responsible for enlarging the library of Santa Croce in Florence in the last half of the fourteenth century. He transcribed not only works of Olivi prohibited by his Order, but also many of Petrarch’s Latin writings, including the *Africa*, the *Secretum*, the *De remediis utriusque fortune*, and his version of Boccaccio’s story of Griselda (*Dec.* X.10). In addition he made copies of Lucian’s dialogues, Seneca’s tragedies, and Boccaccio’s *De genealogia deorum gentilium* and *De casibus virorum illustrium*.⁶⁴ Tedaldo may have studied Greek under Leonzio Pilato in Florence and clearly followed the humanist goal of studying the ancients, even if he wrote very little.⁶⁵

Like the moral thought of the Augustinians, however, the Spiritualist pursuit of absolute poverty broke no new ground; rather it stressed the charismatic asceticism of St. Francis, his firm withdrawal from the snares of the *saeculum*.⁶⁶ Less controversial works of later Trecento Franciscan spirituality reflect this asceticism. The *Fioretti*, vernacular

⁶¹ Felice Tocco, *La questione della povertà nel secolo XIV* (Naples: F. Perrella 1910); Lodovico Brengio, *L’Osservanza francescana in Italia nel secolo XIV* (Rome: Edizioni francescane, 1963); John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); Roberto Lambertini, *La povertà pensata: Evoluzione storica della definizione dell’identità minoritica da Bonaventura ad Ockham* (Modena: Mucchi, 2000).

⁶² Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità*, 37 regarding Angelo Clareno; Raoul Manselli, “Firenze nel Trecento: Santa Croce e la cultura francescana” in his *Da Gioacchino da Fiore a Cristoforo Colombo: Studi sul francescanesimo spirituale, sull’ecclesiologia e sull’escatologismo bassomedievali*, ed. Paolo Vian (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medioevo, 1997), 257–273, especially 260–263 regarding Pier Olivi.

⁶³ See Manselli, “Accettazione e rifiuto della terza età” in *ibid.*, 197; “Ricerche sull’influenza della profezia nel basso medioevo. Premessa” in *ibid.*, 151.

⁶⁴ Francesco Mattesini, “La biblioteca francescana di Santa Croce e Fra Tedaldo della Casa,” *Studi francescani* 57 (1960): 254–316, especially 284, 303–307.

⁶⁵ Mattesini, “La biblioteca francescana,” 277.

⁶⁶ See Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità*, 31–32, on Ubertino da Casale.

legends of Francis and his followers, accent his poverty, self-abnegation, and prayer.⁶⁷ Bartolomeo da Pisa composed his encyclopaedic *De conformitate vitae Beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu* at the close of the Trecento; he may have known Tedaldo della Casa, having lectured at the Florentine *studium*.⁶⁸ Combining a wide range of sources, Bartolomeo seeks to demonstrate the parallel nature of the life of Francis to the life of Christ; Francis was a vehicle for Christ's works, denying his own will and heeding divine counsel.⁶⁹ True to his ascetic ideals Francis is portrayed as rejecting the approaches of women and proclaiming the wickedness of the world, which his Order aimed to reform.⁷⁰ These ideals would indeed gain the admiration of Petrarch and, in later life, Boccaccio, but these humanists would find the separation from the world more difficult, the moral journey more problematic.

More than the Augustinians and Franciscans, the Dominicans influenced the sphere of moral theology in Trecento Italy. Massimo Petrocchi has called the Trecento the inception of an "age of brilliance" for Dominican spirituality.⁷¹ Penco has underlined the mul-

⁶⁷ Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia*, 77–78; Giorgio Petrocchi, *Ascesi e mistica trecentesca* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1957), 85–146; Levasti, ed., *Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento*, 375–420. The *Fioretti* correspond to the Duecento Latin *Actus* of the saint, and were likely compiled in the latter half of the Trecento: Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità*, 77; Giorgio Petrocchi, *Ascesi e mistica*, 127–128; Levasti, ed., *Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento*, 997. For examples of Franciscan humility and seclusion from the *saeculum*, see *ibid.*, 377, 396 ("fuggite il mondo"), and 399 ("Il grande fiume è questo mondo . . . coloro chesanza pericolo passavano sono quegli frati i quali niuna cosa terrena né carnale cercano né posseggono in questo mondo . . .").

⁶⁸ See Manselli's entry on Bartolomeo in *DBI*, vol. 6, 756–758; Mattesini, "La biblioteca francescana," 285. Mattesini places him as "professore nella università fiorentina" around 1373.

⁶⁹ These sources include Biblical, Patristic, classical, scholastic and Franciscan writings. See Manselli's entry cited in previous note; Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità*, 81; Antonio Blasucci, "Le fonti francescane nel 'De conformitate' di Fra Bartolomeo da Pisa (†1401): considerazioni critiche e riflessi nella storia" in Gerardo Cardaropoli and Martino Conti, ed., *Lettura delle fonti francescane attraverso i secoli: il 1400* (Rome: Antonianum, 1981), 301–323; and Carolly Erickson, "Bartholomew of Pisa, Francis Exalted: *De conformitate*," *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 253–274.

⁷⁰ *De conformitate vitae Beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu*, *Analecta Francescana* 4–5 (Florence, 1906–1912), regarding women: 4:38, 477, 482, and 606: "Asserebat etiam frivolum esse mulieris consortium vel colloquium, excepta sola confessione vel instructione brevissima, iuxta quod saluti expedit vel congruit honestati"; also 5:86, 198, 295. With regard to his view of the "world" (*mundus*), see 4:130–137 (a *de contemptu mundi*, with classical references), 441–443; 5:203: ". . . quia qui amicus est mundi huius, inimicus efficitur Dei").

⁷¹ *Storia della spiritualità*, 57: ". . . è noto, la spiritualità domenicana aurà nel Trecento

tifarious activity of the Order, including the pastoral writings of Domenico Cavalca and Jacopo Passavanti.⁷² In relation to their social role, Giorgio Petrocchi notes that the Dominicans addressed the moral issues of the contemporary mercantile society, a thought echoed and amplified in Daniel Lesnick's study of the mendicant orders in Trecento Florence.⁷³ Carlo Delcorno has written of the Dominican effort to express their pastoral concerns in the vernacular with the goal of forwarding lay religious education, even as Franciscan preaching suffered a decline.⁷⁴ M. Michèle Mulchahey has more recently reviewed the role of Italian Dominicans in educating both clergy and laity.⁷⁵

Like Passavanti, a remarkable number of these Dominican writers worked in Tuscany. Some, such as Rainerio da Pisa (†1348) and Giovanni da San Gimignano (†1333) wrote only in Latin. Others, for example Domenico Cavalca (†1342), Bartolomeo da San Concordio (†1347) and Jacopo Passavanti (†1357), composed their treatises in both vernacular and Latin. The writings of Rainerio and Giovanni da San Gimignano are therefore designed for a clerical audience. Rainerio's *Panthologia* is an encyclopedia of theological terms and draws largely on Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. Giovanni composed two

una sua età di fulgore"; see also his "Scrittori di pietà nella spiritualità Toscana e italiana nel Trecento," *Archivio storico italiano* 125 (1967): 3–33, p. 3: "La spiritualità domenicana esplose, mi si passi la parola, in un grande manipolo di scrittori di pietà e di mistici."

⁷² Penco, *Storia della chiesa*, 449. For the spread of their ideas, see M. Michèle Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study": *Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 419–447; 465–466; 549–552 as well as the index of Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi*, 4 vols. (Rome: Ad S. Sabinae, 1970–1993), the last volume with E. Panetta. See also Robert Davidsohn, *Geschichte von Florenz*, v.4.3 (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1927), 37, on the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella: "Die Mönche in der weißen Kutte, bei denen geistiges Leben von je in hoher Geltung stand, haben einen unvergleichlich stärkeren Einfluß auf die Kultur der Arnstadt geübt, als die Genossenschaft der Minoriten, und für die über alle Länder der christlichen Welt ausgebreitete Gemeinschaft bildete Santa Maria Novella einen ihrer bedeutsamsten Stützpunkte, für die römisch-toskanische Ordensprovinz war das Kloster geistiges, wissenschaftliches Zentrum."

⁷³ Giorgio Petrocchi, "Il sentimento religioso all'origine della lingua italiana" in Diego Quagliani, ed., *La crisi del Trecento e il papato Avignonese (1274–1378)* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1994), 381–410, especially 399; Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ *La predicazione nell'età comunale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), 36 and 41.

⁷⁵ Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study."

voluminous reference works for preachers, encyclopedic in their own right, encompassing the proper use of symbols—his *Summa de exemplis*—and a range of funeral sermons (*Sermones funebres*) categorized according to social class, age and sex.⁷⁶ Cavalca, Bartolomeo, and Passavanti devoted themselves to more direct pastoral concerns, for clergy and laity. The first two spent most of their lives in Pisa, where Cavalca supervised convents and Bartolomeo composed his Pisanella-Summa, a widely read penitential handbook. For both vernacular and Latin readers Bartolomeo compiled his *Teachings of the Ancients* (*Anmaestramenti degli antichi/Sententiae antiquorum*), a collection of sayings from Christian and classical authors on a variety of topics. Passavanti lived in Florence as the preacher for the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella. The youngest of the group, he put together a book of his Lenten sermons as the *Mirror of True Penitence* (*Specchio della vera penitenza*). In its prologue he mentions also a Latin version of the text, now vanished. His *Mirror* has been evaluated by scholars more often than any of the other texts here listed, and contains a good number of moral *exempla*.⁷⁷ Delcorno calls Passavanti's *Mirror* "one of the masterworks of devotional literature of the Trecento."⁷⁸

The relation between the Dominicans and Petrarch and Boccaccio is, as with the other religious orders, mostly thematic, but there are more personal connections as well. Boccaccio's short *vita* of Petrarch notes that the elder humanist was acquainted with Enea de' Tolomei (†1348), a Dominican who campaigned against the Fraticelli in Tuscany.⁷⁹ Petrarch's letters to Giovanni Colonna, an historian and scion of the family of his first patrons, will be noted later on.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ While these distinctions in the sermons on the dead may appear to afford a sense of individuality to the various people eulogized, these people are types, not distinct individuals. See David L. d'Avray, "Sermons on the Dead before 1350," in *Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History and Sanctity*, ed. Nicole Bériou and David L. d'Avray (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1994), 175–193, especially 186–187.

⁷⁷ The most thorough analysis of the *Specchio* can be found in Giovanni Getto, "Umanità e stile di Iacopo Passavanti" in *Letteratura religiosa del Trecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 1–105; see also Giorgio Petrocchi, "Il sentimento religioso," 400–401; Massimo Petrocchi, *Storia della Spiritualità*, 65–67 and "Scrittori di pietà," 8–10; Delcorno, *La predicazione*, 42–43; and Miccoli, "La storia religiosa," 829, 846–849.

⁷⁸ *La predicazione*, 42: "... uno dei capolavori della letteratura devota del Trecento."

⁷⁹ Voci (*Petrarca e la vita religiosa*, 38–40) records that he was general inquisitor for Tuscany in 1345 and composed *De paupertate Christi* in response to the Fraticelli's demand for absolute poverty.

⁸⁰ See *Fam.* II.5–8, III.13, VI.2–4.

Colonna, like Petrarch, wrote history with a moral purpose and he attempted to compile source material for his lives of ancient authors.⁸¹ A friend of Colonna who also worked in Avignon was the Florentine Luca Manelli (†1362). He completed an encyclopaedic index to Seneca's work between 1347–1352 that, however, found little distribution.⁸² Petrarch also asked Giovanni dall'Incisa (†1348), the prior of the convent at Santa Maria Novella, for his help in finding manuscripts.⁸³

Yet in their approach to moral problems the Dominicans parted ways with the perspectives and methods of Petrarch and Boccaccio, for example, when it came to the breadth of classical study. Luciano Gargan has studied the Trecento inventory of the Dominican library in Padua and records relatively few classical authors or even Church Fathers, compared to biblical commentaries, scholastic writings, penitential summae and sermon collections; Gargan finds the Paduan library comparable to other libraries of the Order.⁸⁴ Luca Bianchi has written how the Dominican hierarchy insisted that the Order follow a stricter Thomist observance in the Trecento and prohibited the reading of Dante's vernacular works in a council in Florence in 1335.⁸⁵ Passavanti explicitly warns his readers about the moral dangers of unsupervised and incautious reading of classical authors.⁸⁶

⁸¹ See Witt's analysis in *Footsteps*, 283–285. Colonna wrote a universal history (*Mare historiarum*) and a series of lives (*De viris illustribus*), which Petrarch knew as he composed his own biographies.

⁸² Thomas Kaeppli, "Luca Manelli (†1362) e la sua tabulatio e expositio Senecae," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18 (1948): 237–264. Kaeppli uncovered only three codices of this work in Paris, Madrid and Cracow, and notes it may never have found its way into the library of the Dominican convent at Santa Maria Novella in Florence (257). Manelli also composed earlier a *Compendium moralis philosophiae*, based largely on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cicero's *Tusculans*, and Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* (245–248).

⁸³ Voci, *Petrarca e la vita religiosa*, 44–45; *Fam.* III.18. Voci believes that Zanobi da Strada, who aided Petrarch in his search for books, belonged to the circle of Petrarch's admirers close to the Dominican convent.

⁸⁴ *Lo studio teologico e la biblioteca dei domenicani a Padova nel Tre e Quattrocento* (Padua: Antenore, 1971), 186–187. The inventory of 1390 is transcribed on pp. 191–220, and includes Bartolomeo da San Concordio's Pisanella (#56) and Latin *Antique sententie* (#126).

⁸⁵ "Ordini mendicanti et controllo 'ideologico': il caso delle province domenicane" in *Studio e Studia: Le scuole degli ordini mendicanti tra XIII e XIV secolo* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studio sull'alto Medioevo, 2002), 303–338, especially 319–320, 329–334.

⁸⁶ *Specchio della vera penitenza*, ed. Filippo Luigi Polidori (Florence: Le Monnier 1863), 285–286.

We must therefore consider the disparity between the Dominicans' institutional emphasis on moral order, as Miccoli and Cracco note, and the moral philosophical understanding expressed in the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio. While there are obvious shades of difference found among these mendicant authors, nevertheless we may identify the common themes of their treatises that demarcate their standpoint from that of the humanists.

The first concept, which comes to the fore most strongly in the Dominican writers, is that the intellect or *ratio* is the prime faculty in structuring a person's moral life.⁸⁷ The well-ordered soul is guided by reason, and reason impedes or channels the power of the passions. Here one can see the presence of a Platonic, Aristotelian, or Stoic moral hierarchy, a presence not entirely alien to Petrarch's way of thinking.⁸⁸ But among the Tuscan Dominicans the concept of the *ratio*'s sovereignty is almost uncontested, even if the precise relation between grace and intellect, and intellect and will, is obscure.

The second theme of their writings, related to the first, is that a moral soul is an ordered soul. The mendicants are preoccupied with establishing an *anima ordinata*, and contrasting it with the disorder created by the eruption of sin. As in the rightful hierarchy passion should submit to reason, sin and disorder are attributed to emotions that slip the reins of the *ratio*.

There are logical, symbolic and ontological corollaries that follow from these two themes. It is important to see the consistency of the mendicant viewpoint, in order to appreciate the struggle of the contemporary humanists to resist and undermine it, primarily through the means of paradox and irony.

A prime logical corollary to these thematic premises is the emphasis on learning. If the *ratio* or intellect is the pilot that navigates the soul's moral course, then those highly trained or adept in the use

⁸⁷ See Penco's note on the "il principio tomistico del primato dell'intelletto nel campo psicologico" among Trecento Dominicans (*Storia della chiesa*, 467).

⁸⁸ We shall examine the humanists' relation to these traditions in the course of this study. Both humanists and mendicants could derive their understanding of Plato's moral psychology from Augustine's *De vera religione* (e.g. 3.3, to which *Secretum* 2.11.1 alludes), and *De civitate dei* VIII.5 and 8, IX.2, and XIX.21 and 27. In addition to Augustine they could gain knowledge of Plato's ideas through Cicero, e.g. *Tusculanarum disputationum libri* I.10.20 (see *Secretum* 2.16.4). The dominance of the *ratio* in the moral soul is confirmed by Aristotle in *Nich. Ethics* 7. All references to the *Secretum* are from the edition by Úgo Dotti (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1993).

of their intellect are the watchmen for others, who guide and protect the congregation. The clerical emphasis on the intellect neatly redounds to support their own status as pastors in the lives of the laity. Furthermore, the understanding of the *ratio* advanced in these treatises corresponds to the moral and social distance between the clergy and laity. Just as the rational faculty observes a proposition as an object to be granted or denied the attribute of truth—a concept expressed by Aquinas in both style and thought⁸⁹—so too does it stand aloof from the emotions it controls. The *ratio*, like its clerical practitioners, remains in a higher class, apart and distinct, from that which it steers and protects.

The symbolic associations of this ordered hierarchy are far-reaching. The relation between reason and emotion is duplicated by that between clergy and laity. And the *ratio* is considered a masculine attribute; succumbing to emotion, by contrast, is a symptom of irrational effeminacy. The masculine watcher of the soul, embodied in the mendicant preacher, takes special care with respect to his lay charges who, in their moral essence, have a greater proclivity to be feminine, emotional, and disordered. While the sexual and social implications were obvious then and are also today, we should recognize that people in their sexual and social status possessed a symbolic resonance within the contemporary worldview, one that manifests itself in the artistic expressions of the time.⁹⁰ For example, we can perceive Boccaccio's address to women in the *Decameron* as more than a literary convention or social critique; it can be part of an enterprise that questions the rational moral hierarchy advanced by his mendicant contemporaries.

Of great importance are the ontological pre-suppositions of the mendicants' moral system. The quality of Being they advocate is one of static order that transcends the passing of time. Transience and temporal change have no fundamental effect either on the functioning of soul's moral order or on the way this order is conceived. Once reaching the age of maturity, a person is expected to maintain self-control in the face of all temporal events. The moral soul, in its

⁸⁹ See *Summa Theologiae* 1A qu.16 a.1: "Sic ergo veritas principaliter est in intellectu; secundario vero in rebus, secundum quod comparantur ad intellectum ut ad principium."

⁹⁰ See Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

similarity to the nature of the Creator, perceives and acts in a spiritual fashion, without respect to the influence of time and place. Fluctuations of will are considered character flaws, for the vacillation results from the challenge of the passions to the *ratio*'s supremacy. Time is therefore the medium of emotion and the body, stasis and stability are qualities of reason. With tight logical consistency or, to their critics, circularity, the mendicants formulate this idea of Being as if it were independent of historical circumstance or emotional mood. They represent their conception of the moral good of the soul in a highly impersonal way, as if unmediated by the biographies of particular individuals or by their own situation. The idea stands forth with little noticeable rhetorical or poetic flourish. Like emotions, time and history are subsidiary, accidental qualities in relation to the immutable world of rational apprehension. When symbolic narrative is employed, as in the case of *exempla*, the clerical authors take pains to circumscribe its moral meaning.

The Dominicans typically base their conception of ontology and moral thought upon Aristotelian metaphysics. The security of their moral system is predicated upon attributes of Being as timeless, unchangeable, eternal, rational, and good.⁹¹ The humanists challenge these metaphysical preconceptions in a way more daring and far-reaching than many of their Quattrocento successors. To Petrarch and Boccaccio any ontology is conditioned by time. What is *claimed* as metaphysical truth—not truth itself—is reduced to the realm of ephemera, as a temporal phenomenon, since the reality of time's flow conditions all human knowledge. A systematic morality is undermined as well. The thinking of these humanists, at its most profound, surfaces in time and through time, animated by the dialectical polarity of the significance of the momentary, of the permanence of the transient.

This overview of these clerical writers is suggestive of their activity in and around Florence during the first half of the fourteenth century, as Petrarch and Boccaccio were developing their ideas. We shall uncover direct allusions to the mendicants in the writings of these humanists, but, given that their enterprise makes use of a poetic style of discourse, the connections are normally oblique, relying on an audience's shared capacity to recognize paradox and irony. An

⁹¹ See *Metaphysics* 1071a–1072b; *Summa Theologiae* 1A qu.2–12.

overview of their fundamental paradoxes clarifies the disjunction between their approach to moral thinking and the Dominican method outlined above.

The essence of the humanists' paradox of the mutability of the self is found in the opening sonnet of his *Canzoniere*: "When I in part was not the man I am today" [*Canz.* I,4: "quand' era in parte altr' uom da quel ch' i' sono"].⁹² The self persists in time, yet this very continuity allows it to notice how it changes, physically, mentally, and not least emotionally. In contrast to the mendicant position, time is presented here as the medium for self-examination, and this study discovers the self's consistency and its alterations. Petrarch's incessant revision of his writings, in particular of his letters and poetry, testifies to his heartfelt, existential awareness of this paradox. Scholars of Petrarch are confronted with the irony that a man so attuned to life's changes and passage of time should leave them a body of writing so difficult to date with historical precision. But this irony is nurtured by his self-scrutiny and subjectivity. Boccaccio for his part takes the awesome events of the Black Death as an occasion to portray epistemological and ontological uncertainty, especially the anxious, if liberating signs of this uncertainty. For the Plague breaks the bounds of conventional wisdom. It shows forth the power of fortune or providence at its most transcendent, and sharpens these writers' focus on the psychological responses of people coming to terms with

⁹² Petrarch, *The Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, ed. and trans. M. Musa (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1996), 2–3. See the commentary on this line by Adelia Noferi, *Frammenti per i Fragmenta di Petrarca*, ed. L. Tassoni (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001), 28: "Nel *Canzoniere* il tema della diversità-metamorfofi si intreccerà infatti con quello della permanenza-identità (cf. CXLIV.13: "sarò qual fui" and CLII.13: "non son più quel che già fui"); CXII.4: "et son pur quel ch'i'm'era" and CCCXIX.3–5: "così dentro e di for mi vo cangiando ch'a pena riconosco omai me stesso"), così come il tema della scissione tra passato e presente con quello della inscindibilità e compresenza della scansioni temporali in un assoluto non-tempo (il 'sempre presente')." Thomas Greene sees this line as introducing an "ontological theme": "the struggle to discern a self or compose a self which could stand as a fixed or knowable substance" (*Light in Troy*, 124). I see in Petrarch's writings a struggle not so much for this aim as for an acceptance and exploration of this paradox. See also *Epistola metrica* I.1.46: "Vivendoque simul morimur rapimurque manendo" [As we live at the same time we are dying, and we are taken even as we remain], cited by Umberto Bosco, *Francesco Petrarca* (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 55. Arnaud Tripet has expressed the following variation on this theme: "L'on peut dire en effet que la psyché pétrarquienne est instable, et qu'elle se sait telle, mais que le nombre des variations dont elle est susceptible est immuable": *Pétrarque ou la connaissance de soi* (Geneva: Droz, 1967), 86.

their own precarious existence. Petrarch and Boccaccio are pioneers in historiography, since their subjective approach to their lives and the world's events fosters an appreciation both for the value of history and also for the impermanence of the historical record itself. For history has much to teach us about past examples of virtue and vice and the singularity of our present; but the record of history is fated to undergo the vicissitudes of time itself: of war, natural disaster, human neglect, and not least volatile personal opinion and bias. Petrarch expressed this sense of insecurity in his *Triumphus Temporis*, "The Triumph of Time":

I now see the quick flight of my life,
and then of all others', and in the fleeting sun
the open ruin of the world.

[Veggio or la fugga del mio viver presta,
anzi di tutti, e nel fuggir del sole
la ruina del mondo manifesta.]⁹³

While Petrarch records here a feeling of life's brevity akin to that expressed by Horace, he adds a characteristic note of self-reflection—"the quick flight of *my* life"—which he then relates to the ephemeral nature of the secular macrocosm. Not only the traces of past events in the external world but also our perception of them are conditioned by the flow of time.⁹⁴

Since the humanists considered both the perceiver and the object of his perception to be in flux, they preoccupied themselves with the epistemological problem of achieving insight into reality amidst the myriad possibilities for deception. What the mendicants regarded as human frailty—the pursuit of passion, the immersion in time's flow—became for the humanists the character of the human condition, in which all took part, including the doctors of the Church. Wisdom came from recognizing folly, but when did anyone extricate himself to the point of seeing folly in its entirety? To assert a stable ontological basis for one's objectivity toward truth or falsehood was to

⁹³ *Rime e Trionfi*, ed. Mario Apollonio and Lina Ferro (Brescia: La scuola, 1972), 793 (lines 67–69).

⁹⁴ Shakespeare would convey this sensibility in his Sonnet 123, lines 9–12: "Thy [Time's] registers and thee I both defy, / Not wondering at the present nor the past; / For thy records and what we see doth lie, / Made more or less by thy continual haste. . . ."

be truly blinded. Yet it was upon this basis that the mendicants predicated their *exempla*, stories that conveyed moral truths transcending time and circumstance. For the humanists, insight into one's personal state of mind was inconsistent and of the moment. One encountered it spontaneously, even unawares. This paradox underscores the humanists' awareness of how time and history qualify one's comprehension of moral truth, and it also helps explain why rhetoric, as it tailored its message to a specific audience, became increasingly important for poet and preacher alike. Both the ebullient author of the *Decameron* and the introspective writer of the *Secretum* drew upon the reader's access to the psychological dimension, in terms of which moral dicta and *exempla*, as expressed by the friars, falsified the contours of the human experience.

It might seem at this point that the humanists were prepared to declare a war against tradition under the banner of moral or cultural relativity, and overthrow tradition's spokesmen as so many directors of the idols of the theatre. Certain features of ecclesiastical writing were repugnant to them, in particular the scholastic use of Latin. But they disliked this form of expression the more they came to appreciate the Church Fathers and classical authors in a new way. The subjectivity of the humanists did not therefore exalt the individual's opinion over that of ancient authorities. Rather it established a different relationship with them, in which the individual was conscious of his responsibility and freedom to authorize those writers who in his view conveyed the greatest wisdom. The responsibility and freedom assumed by the humanists did not breed arrogance, but on the contrary was framed by the knowledge of human frailty and self-deception in oneself as well as among the ancients, an awareness, to their eyes, absent from the scholastic tradition. It is hardly surprising therefore if the writers highly prized by Petrarch and Boccaccio—Augustine, Seneca, Horace, Ovid, and Heraclitus—should have emphasized the power of time's passage and the shifting moments of vanity and honesty in the course of one's life.

The "revival of antiquity" has been stressed as the central idea of the "renaissance" from Boccaccio to Vasari. Yet what these humanists pursued in their rediscovery of the ancients was not merely an intellectual armature, but more importantly an echo or confirmation of their new and unsettled sensibility. Petrarch and Boccaccio were seeking models among the ancients that would help them characterize a conception of the self discomforted by the customs of the

contemporary Church. The humanists' search for meaning in their lives cannot be explained therefore by new educational institutions or conventions of reading a cadre of authors; it was the search itself, their self-examination, that urged them to test conventions, and affirm or reject some writers in relation to others. By 1360 Petrarch wrote to Philippe de Cabassoles, Bishop of Cavaillon, to whom he also addressed *On the Solitary Life*, "I am my own witness, my own master authority."⁹⁵ True enough, the Church, through the mendicants, was altering its message for the times, but their patterns were more limited.

The ecclesiastical and humanist writers treated the topic of temporality itself in varying ways, in light of their separate approaches to the problem of existence. The mendicants understood the sea as a symbol for the temporal medium, the *saeculum*, in which one journeyed under guidance of clergy, who provided the fixed verities from reason and dogma. For the humanists the sea turned into a more elusive metaphor, connoting how all human knowledge vacillates, how successive moments strengthen or weaken one's grasp on reason, language, and time itself. The sea-image underscored the irony inherent in the humanist investigator, who allows the waves of contradiction to alter and even reverse his progress, who, like Socrates, avows his wisdom to consist in the proof of his ignorance.⁹⁶

These humanists extended their testing of conventions, both intellectual and symbolic, into the heart of contemporary moral teaching, which opposed the demands of virtue to the allure of pleasure. For the mendicants, virtue remained secure in the citadel of Reason and exercised its sovereignty over the teeming mass of temporal, fleeting

⁹⁵ *Fam.* XXIV.1.24: "ipse michi testis, ipse auctor ydoneus."

⁹⁶ Although recent literary commentators have noted the importance of temporality for Petrarch, they have not placed their commentary either in context of the contemporary cultural context or in relation to his writings' objective to involve the reader's sense of his or her historical place. In general they have overlooked the centrality of the sea-metaphor in conveying the humanist awareness of temporality. See Barolini, "The Making of a Lyric Sequence"; Riccardo Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979), ch. 3; Gianfranco Folena, "L'orologio del Petrarca," *Libri e documenti: Archivio storico civico e biblioteca trivulziana* 5.3 (1979): 1-12; Giovanni Getto, "'Triumpus Temporis': Il sentimento del tempo nell'opera di Francesco Petrarca," *Letterature comparate: Problemi e metodo: Studi in onore di Ettore Paratore* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1981), 3:1243-1272; and Edoardo Taddeo, "Petrarca e il tempo: Il tempo come tema nelle opere latine," *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 25 (1982): 53-76.

desires. Since the humanists suspected the fraudulence of this hierarchy, insistent as it was upon a false ontology separate from the motion of time, they also scrutinized the ecclesiastical system of moral approval and opprobrium. One question was central: what can the experience of pleasure, especially the pleasures of sex and fame, teach people about ethics or the moral good? Perhaps these experiences are not so inherently vicious as the Church would have one believe. Or if they are truly dangerous temptations in the pilgrimage of the soul, at the very least the route to discovering their danger diverges from the highway of doctrine. This evaluation of convention moreover is equally apparent when these humanists examined sexual attraction as it relates to the nature of women. For if Petrarch and Boccaccio often associate women with the realm of temporal change, they never fail to remember, unlike their Dominican counterparts, that they, as men, also belong to this realm.⁹⁷ When their writings make use of the traditional, denigrating characterizations of women, an identifiable narrator gives color to these expressions, and the reader may attend less to the image of femininity than to the personality of the particular narrator or protagonist who, as a flawed, individual human being, expresses this image.⁹⁸ The ethical impetus of the humanists therefore carries their thinking away from the *a priori* moral maxims of the mendicants to a more conditional, *a posteriori* exploration that validated virtue in the passage of time. Yet the ethical teaching of Petrarch and Boccaccio never loses sight of universal standards of right and wrong. It does not embrace relativism. Only the means of gaining insight into these standards must follow the path cut according to an individual's character, a path formed and featured from his experience.

⁹⁷ It is interesting, if beyond the limits of this study, to consider Carolyn Walker Bynum's conclusion that late-medieval women viewed "woman" as a symbol not so much opposed to "man," but rather for circumscribing humanity itself, as opposed to divinity (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Woman*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 282–296); see her statement "women's symbols express contradiction and opposition less than synthesis and paradox" (289). See also her essay "... And Woman His Humanity": Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages" in: *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Steven Harrell, Caroline Bynum, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 257–288.

⁹⁸ See the poet in *Canz.* 183 or the figure of Rinieri in *Dec.* VIII.7, discussed later in this study.

This study of the leading Trecento humanists therefore aims to supplement Burckhardt's magisterial work in ways his exposition left undeveloped. We shall see that early Renaissance humanism must be placed in context of the mendicant Church. Unlike Burckhardt's diachronic sense of Renaissance culture succeeding that of the medieval Church, we posit a more synchronic relationship that responded to the same historical events. Trecento humanists and friars struggled to convince their audience that their knowledge of the self and morality was both accurate and necessary, and the outcome of the struggle remained a long time in doubt. Furthermore in contrast to Burckhardt's more phenomenological approach, our focus is on the history of ideas and is devoted to analyzing philosophical, cultural and doctrinal concepts, often in the form of their symbolic expression.

Humanists and mendicants debated different ethical understandings in light of their views of temporality, subjectivity, and emotion. These debates were at times internalized by the humanists themselves. Both Petrarch and Boccaccio conceived of the *poeta theologus*, the poet-theologian, who conveyed moral truths through poetic allegory.⁹⁹ But as these truths are posited *a priori*, this conception differs from their sensibility for the philosophical quality of the poetic, a sensibility that underscores the experiential path to self-awareness. The *poeta theologus* therefore represents a retreat from the existential immediacy of this primal sensibility.

Given this struggle among the early humanists, our treatment helps explain how, in a word, the Renaissance lost its nerve. For although the battle between these competing conceptions in the early Renaissance would inspire later writers and artists, it would also become muted and dissipated in more mainstream humanist enterprises that retained an interest in the classics, but offered less challenge to ecclesiastical and cultural conventions. The later currents of Florentine humanism, for example that led by Brunni and Ficino, would leave undisturbed

⁹⁹ The literature on the *poeta theologus* is extensive. See for example Ronald Witt, "Coluccio Salutati and the Conception of the *Poeta Theologus* in the Fourteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30.4 (1977): 538–563; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2:689–697; and Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, vol. 1: *Lo scrittoio del Petrarca* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1947), 121–124. Billanovich reports that, while visiting Petrarch in Padua in 1351, Boccaccio would have read Petrarch's 1349 letter to Gherardo (*Fam.* X.4), which discusses the relation between philosophy and poetry.

the ontologies of Plato and Aristotle, reconciling these thinkers more easily to the traditions of the Church.

Petrarch and Boccaccio develop a mode of philosophical thinking and expression that, being rooted in the poetic, is unsystematic. It conveys scepticism toward the metaphysical positions of contemporary Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism. Their empirical approach to life's uncertainties, their awareness of psychological blindness, their sense of emotion's sway will bear fruit among sixteenth-century writers and thinkers such as Montaigne and Erasmus and a few of their Quattrocento forerunners, such as Alberti and Valla. Their use of poetry and paradox parallel modern reactions to metaphysical dogma, from Kierkegaard's creative response to Hegelianism to Heidegger's return to the power of pre-Socratic thinking, in part inspired through his reading of Hölderlin.¹⁰⁰

In his study *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, Ronald Witt has demonstrated how poetry, history and the personal letter were the venues in which humanists developed their sensibility for *vetustas*.¹⁰¹ We shall see how classical poets impart instruction for living to Petrarch and Boccaccio, and therefore the humanists' own literary work extends this fruitful interplay of precept and passion to their readers.¹⁰² In as much as these humanists also expressed their approach to life in both Latin and the vernacular, their humanism is not confined to Latin writing. Indeed they modulated the ancient heritage of poetry and philosophy through the Tuscan dialect, a medium, not coincidentally, less dominated by ecclesiastical convention. Since the philosophical orientation of these humanists decisively parted ways and presented paths that diverged from traditional moral thought, it is appropriate to designate their writings as belonging to the Renaissance.

We can observe Petrarch's intimation of a new philosophical understanding in a letter to Giovanni Colonna, the prime Dominican correspondent in the *Familiars*. Writing to him around 1341, Petrarch

¹⁰⁰ See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 37 [IV 204]: "But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow . . . This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think."

¹⁰¹ Witt, *Footsteps*, 78, 93.

¹⁰² E.g. *Fam.* X.5.10–12, in which Petrarch explicitly names poets as among those who care for the soul, i.e. philosophers.

discusses how time and place affect one's awareness of the truth. The flow of the letter's argument testifies to this conception, for Petrarch introduces, in the first line, the metaphor of the journey: "We used to take walks [*deambulabamus*] through Rome together." He then moves to reflecting on the Peripatetics; their custom of "walking about" [*obambulandi*] is "most suited to my nature and my habits." Yet paradoxically Petrarch uses these peripatetic walks to sample and adopt ideas from different philosophical schools at various moments: "For I do not love sects, but the truth. At one time I am a Peripatetic, another a Stoic, and then again an Academic [sceptic]; often however none of them, whenever I discover anything in their schools that might be opposed to or mistrusted by the true and blessed faith."¹⁰³

Rome is the locus for his thoughts on classical philosophy and Christian truth. Petrarch associates the city with its twin legacy, and with his momentary susceptibility to experience the legacy's different phases. He evaluates each one in sequence, but distinguishes the limited, human accomplishments from revealed wisdom that remains his guiding star. If subordinating classical wisdom to Christian revelation is traditional, we must yet observe the form in which Petrarch portrays this idea, and the implications of this portrayal. For what are the signposts along the journey toward truth, if not human and transient, and perceived by one who is also human?¹⁰⁴

Petrarch focuses his eye on the wandering, the consecutive recollections of times and spaces that fill the memory with meaning. Rome forms the ideal site for this undertaking and the experience of recollection: "We would wander together in this city so great, which seemed, on account of its vast region, to have an immense populace; nor would we wander so much into the city as around it, and feel

¹⁰³ *Fam.* VI.2.1: "Deambulabamus Romi soli. Meum quidem obambulandi peripateticum morem nosti. Placet; nature moribusque meis aptissimus est . . . non etenim sectas amo, sed verum. Itaque nunc peripateticus, nunc stoicus sum, interdum academicus; sepe autem nichil horum, quotiens quicquam occurrit apud eos, quod vere ac beatifice fidei adversum suspectum ve sit."

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Summit's article "Topography as Historiography: Petrarch, Chaucer and the Making of Medieval Rome" (*Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 30:2 (2000): 211–246) provides an important corrective to a tendency among scholars to overlook the letter's Christian quality. Yet she does not account for the temporal, human nature of Petrarch's authorship, which grounds all his assertions, or for his special focus, in conversation with his Dominican recipient, on classical monuments.

both voice and mind excited at every step.”¹⁰⁵ The desultory, circuitous route for Petrarch is typically the most edifying. Similar to his famous ascent up Mt. Ventoux, the straightest way became the most deviant to his character, and his character revealed itself most resistant to rectilinear and narrow pathways. He fills the central section of his letter to Colonna with memories of various monuments to classical Roman history, ending with briefer references to Christian martyrs. Then, with customary reversal, he asks Colonna: “But why do I go on? Can I possibly describe Rome to you on this little piece of paper? And indeed, if I could, no matter: you know everything. . . .”¹⁰⁶

The letter therefore does not simply record his memory of Roman history; it composes primarily a memorial to their shared experience. The humanist’s sense of history encompasses both past and present existence. And his recollection of this history, of others and of his own, is simultaneously enriched and imperiled by his sensitivity to time’s passing. Petrarch develops this understanding most poetically at the letter’s close. He recalls how the two friends relaxed in the stillness of the Diocletian Baths, a place both timeless and timeful:

After the exertion from our walk around the immense city, we would customarily rest at the Baths of Diocletian, and indeed sometimes ascend upon the vaults of this once magnificent place, since the clean air and open view and silence and longed-for solitude were here as nowhere else. . . . And having traversed along the walls of the fallen city and sitting there, we beheld the fragments of ruins before our eyes. What then? We talked at length of history. . . .¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ VI.2.5: “Vagabamur pariter in illa urbe tam magna, que cum propter spatium vacua videatur, populum habet immensum; nec in urbe tantum sed circa urbem vagabamur, aderatque per singulos passus quod linguam atque animum excitaret.”

¹⁰⁶ VI.2.14: “Sed quo pergo? Possum ne tibi in hac parva papiro Romam designare? Profecto, si possum, non oportet; nosti omnia. . . .”

¹⁰⁷ VI.2.15–16: “Solebamus ergo, post fatigationem quam nobis immensa urbs ambita pepererat, sepius ad Termas Dioclitianas subsistere, nonnunquam vero supra testudinem illius magnificentissime olim domus ascendere, quod et aer salutaris et prospectus liber et silentium ac votiva solitudo nusquam magis. . . . Et euntibus per menia fracte urbis et illic sedentibus, ruinarum fragmenta sub oculis erant. Quid ergo? Multus de historiis sermo erat. . . .” Thomas Greene, in his *Light in Troy*, discusses this letter in context of his observation that Petrarch took the initial step to ‘discover’ history: “. . . he was the first to notice that classical antiquity was very different from his own medieval world, and the first to consider antiquity more admirable” (90). Greene’s analytical purpose is to establish what he calls a “sub-reading” of the classical foundations of Petrarch’s works (93). Yet he overlooks Petrarch’s sense of the evanescence and fragility of the past, especially in declaring that in this letter Petrarch was “[o]blivious like all his contemporaries to the atmospheric appeal of the ruins in themselves. . . .” (88).

Gazing on the meditative vista from this decayed classical monument, the two friends discourse on history. If there is a monastic quiet surrounding them, nonetheless the view is also turned outward, across time and place, a perspective Petrarch reduplicates in the letter's narrative. Fatigue and refreshment comingling upon the vaults, Petrarch examined the classical, the Dominican Colonna the Christian past. Colonna asked him about the history of the liberal arts, and he complied, "since the hour of the day and freedom [*vacuitas*] from useless concerns and the place itself encouraged me," in addition to his friend's rapt attention. Time, place, mood, and listener convened at that moment.¹⁰⁸

But again the humanist sensibility toward temporality, subjectivity, and emotional mood, so profound at this moment in time and recollection, engage Petrarch in paradox. For even as Petrarch summons the moment of their friendly discussion after the day's long walk, a moment pressed upon his memory, the moment is also, like the cityscape, fragmented and effaced. Petrarch is unable to record what he told Colonna that day, and he is also aware, in equal sharpness, of the change between that day and the present. The remembered moment is both past and present, recalled but never repeated:

Give me back that place, that relaxed atmosphere, that day, that instant of your attention, that vein of my thinking: I could do today what I always could. But all is changed: the place is gone, the day is passed, the relaxation vanished, instead of your face I stare at mute letters, and the fracturing of things left behind me impedes my mind and sounds in my ears even now. . . .¹⁰⁹

The humanist remembers both the moment and its fragility, its singularity, be it wrecked or eroded by time's flow. Memory preserves

¹⁰⁸ VI.2.17: "quod hora diei et vacuitas initilium curarum et ipse locus hortabatur. . . ."

¹⁰⁹ VI.2.18: "Redde michi illum locum, illud otium, illam diem, illam attentionem tuam, illam ingenii mei venam: potero quod unquam potui. Sed mutata sunt omnia; locus abest, dies abijt, otium periit, pro facie tua mutas literas aspicio, ingenio meo relicatarum a tergo rerum fragor officit, qui adhuc in auribus meis tonat. . . ." On this passage and the dating of the letter, see Ernest Wilkins's article "On Petrarch's *Ep. Fam. VI 2*" first printed in *Speculum* 38 (1963): 620–622 and reprinted in *Studies on Petrarch and Boccaccio*, ed. Aldo Bernardo (Padua: Antenore 1978): 267–271. Wilkins judges the letter to have been written in June 1341, approximately two months after their meeting in Rome, where Petrarch had been to receive his coronation as poet laureate. See also his *Petrarch's Correspondence* (Padua: Antenore, 1960), 59, which places the letter between 1337 and 1341.

the past, and also the past's ephemeral quality, since memory itself is molded by time.¹¹⁰

In the writings of the Trecento church, one sees little of this sensibility. The perception of Petrarch and Boccaccio that all epistemological assertions are qualified by time and place, by speaker and audience, and by emotional atmosphere broke free from the traditional ecclesiastical practices, and it was these practices, the 'straighter way,' that frame the humanist departure and lend it its historical innovation.

¹¹⁰ See VI.2.17: "... omnia enim undecunque didicimus, nostra sunt, nisi forsan abstulerit ea nobis oblivio." Among the various commentators Giuseppe Mazzotta in his *The Worlds of Petrarch* has more sharply appreciated the sense of temporality in the letter, even though his treatment fails to capture Petrarch's dialectical sense of how time erodes, yet preserves in memory. Thus Mazzotta's claim that the "ruins suspend the principle of identity and show that the past is out of reach" (19) eliminates the possibility of re-acquaintance, which Petrarch sought to realize in style and thought. Mazzotta does indeed qualify this assertion later with the fine sentence: "The ruins, which are narratives of lost realities, are not lifeless relics; rather, they are inexhaustible coils of memory, tumultuous signs rising up from the dark depths of time" (22).

CHAPTER TWO

TRACKING THE VAGARIES OF TIME: ANXIETY AND FREEDOM IN HUMANIST ACCOUNTS OF THE PLAGUE OF 1348

As is clear from Petrarch's letter to Giovanni Colonna, the humanists' sensibility of time's passage left its imprint on their writing of history. They were fascinated with how the self records past events while aware of their evanescence, how the self locates its place in history even as it notices that the flow of time sweeps away any permanent calculation. The self and the past, it seems, are fixed only momentarily; yet the self gathers its knowledge in the temporal flow, being able to chart changes in the world within and without. Whereas Petrarch focused primarily on the personal world, on the mutability of the self, Boccaccio addressed the challenge of chronicling the life of a city, Florence. Both humanists were struck by the single greatest upheaval of their times, the Black Death of 1348, and this crisis affected their appreciation of history in a way that contrasts sharply with their more ecclesiastically-minded contemporaries. The humanists' recurring sense of transience, intensified by the plague, fostered their scepticism, and they conveyed this scepticism to their readers not only by the content of their remarks, but also through the form of their expression.

Scholars studying the historiography of the later Middle Ages have sought to trace the flow and ebb of salvation history, in which human sinfulness and divine justice are considered to be the major forces behind historical events. The timing of the break to a more secular historiography has been placed by many in the fifteenth century, beginning with Leonardo Bruni;¹ others have located its appearance

¹ Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 137–9; E.B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), 13, 21; Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 151–155; Donald J. Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1969), 33.

in the early fourteenth century, in the writings of Albertino Mussato or Ferreto de' Ferreti.² The Black Death, therefore, does not loom large as a watershed in historical writing. But is it possible that the plague of 1348 could have called forth a new moment in historiography? While the effect of the Black Death on the visual arts of the fourteenth century has been a subject of debate since Millard Meiss's study, the plague's relation to the writing of history at this time has been largely overlooked.³

Nonetheless if we look closely at reactions to the Black Death among historical writers, we may see the plague as a supreme test: for how does an historian come to terms with a force of such deadly mortality? Much like the two World Wars or the Holocaust in the twentieth century, could not the Black Death have brought thinkers and writers to re-examine the human ability to know the relation between historical cause and effect?⁴

² Thus the importance of Ronald Witt's study on the early humanists: *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*. See Mussato's *Historia augusta* or *De gestis Italicorum post Henricum VII Caesarem*, or Ferreto's *Historia rerum in Italia gestorum*. Note, for example, the classicizing manner in which Mussato treats the election of Henry VII as Holy Roman Emperor, a manner in which, on the surface, the divine character of the election is not neglected: "Sciscitatis itaque clandestine (ut assolet) vocibus, Henrici vox edita est quaternis assensibus; binis scilicet Treueriensis, et Maguntini ad idem innitentium; et binis, qui ob aliorum invidias animos diverterant, non votis; sed aliorum contemptibus in Henricum. Sive autem sic, seu Divinitatem humanis anteponamus conatibus, declaratus est Henricus Romanorum Imperator semper Augustus convenientibus porrò et reliquis. . .": *Historia augusta*, lib.1 rub.iv, in: Albertino Mussato, *Historia augusta Henrici VII Caesaris et alia, quae extant opera*, ed. Lorenzo Pignoria (Venice: ex Typ. Ducali Pinelliana, 1636), 2. I thank Ronald Witt for referring me to these works.

³ See Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951); Henk van Os, "The Black Death and Sieneese Painting," *Art History* 4 (1981): 237–249; Diana Norman, "Change and Community: Art and Religion after the Black Death," in *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280–1400*, ed. Diana Norman (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 1:177–195; Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State UP, 2000). Lucia Battaglia Ricci's *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio e i cicli pittorici del 'Trionfo della morte'*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Salerno, 2000) comments on relation between the Black Death and cultural emphasis on penitence, parodied by Boccaccio's story of Filippo Balducci (IV.intro.), but not on the relation between the plague and Boccaccio's narrative of events in Florence.

⁴ One need only consider Camus's *The Rebel*, his analysis of modern history, which he wrote in the 1940's, in the same period as *The Plague*. Compare also the conclusion by Sverre Baage, in reference to the sixteenth century: "As often, crisis and tragedy had a stimulating effect on historiography." "Medieval and Renaissance Historiography: Break or Continuity?," *The European Legacy* 2:8 (1997): 1367. In contemporary Arabian historiography, the effect of the Black Death was enormous.

Comparing first the responses to the plague by the Florentine chronicler Matteo Villani and the humanist Giovanni Boccaccio we see that, in Villani's chronicle, the tradition of salvation history persisted after 1348, though not without inherent logical difficulties. Boccaccio's account, in the opening to the *Decameron*, contrasts with Villani's narrative not simply through its secular realism, as asserted by Alberto Tenenti, but more fundamentally through a scepticism toward all objective certainties about historical knowledge.⁵ Scepticism has been treated as a hallmark of later Renaissance thinking, yet its emergence in the Trecento deserves greater attention.⁶ In the realm of

Thus Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) writes: “It [the plague] swallowed up many of the good things of civilization and wiped them out. It overtook the dynasties at the time of their senility, when they had reached the limit of their duration. . . . The entire inhabited world changed. . . . It was as if the voice of existence in the world had called out for oblivion and restriction, and the world had responded to its call. . . .” *The Muqaddimah*, transl. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 1:64. This devastation presented a new challenge for historians: “When there is a general change in conditions, it is as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered, as if it were a new and repeated creation, a world brought into existence anew. Therefore, there is need at this time that someone should systematically set down the situation of the world among all regions and races, as well as the customs and sectarian beliefs that have changed for their adherents. . . .” (1:65). I thank Heath King for referring me to his work.

⁵ Alberto Tenenti also emphasizes how Boccaccio describes “vari aspetti oggettivi della situazione creata dalla pestilenza”: “La rappresentazione della morte di massa nel Decameron” reprinted in *Tod im Mittelalter*, ed. A. Borst *et al.*, 2nd ed. (Constance: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1995), 209–219, esp. 215. Tenenti is right in pointing out Boccaccio's use of “osservazione empirica” (210) and the differences between his narrative and those treatises “di ispirazione ecclesiastica” as regards a spiritual or moral intention (211). Yet Tenenti does not perceive the core characteristic that underlies these aspects of Boccaccio's account and most decisively separates it from contemporary versions. Tenenti sees Boccaccio as an ordered, detached observer who has determined the dividing line between, in Tenenti's terminology, the values “umani” and the “disumano” (214, 216–217), “profana” and “sacra” (214), ‘real’ [*realismo*] and “ideologici” (213, 218), “sociologiche” and the “condizionamenti morali più tradizionali e stereotipi” (215). These terms are Tenenti's, not Boccaccio's, and in fact it is only the moralist Villani who uses the word “inhumanity” when criticizing the behavior of the Florentines. Tenenti's use of these terms leads him to overlook the self-consciousness implicit in Boccaccio's empiricism. In discussing the “atteggiamenti psicologici” (e.g. 217) of the survivors, Tenenti misses how Boccaccio's subjectivity permits him to enter into the psychological world of his fellow citizens (for indeed he is among them), and put to the test, in context of the disaster, moral pre-judgments about virtue and sin, the humane or the inhumane. This self-awareness is the foundation of Boccaccio's scepticism, a critical feature of his narrative not fully appreciated by Tenenti, who instead describes Boccaccio's position as “sostanzialmente agnostica” (210–211).

⁶ See Richard H. Popkin's comments on “Theories of Knowledge” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge:

scholasticism, Ockham, Gregory of Rimini, and Nicholas of Autrecourt emphasized the limited certainty of human cognition derived from specific sensory perceptions, and questioned whether metaphysical truths could be charted by human science.⁷ Boccaccio's historical narrative shows us a key instance of scepticism's role in the Renaissance, grounded in the anxiety over the new possibilities for human thought and action unveiled by the plague. He shared this anxiety with Petrarch, in a way that, despite the differences of genre, links the *Decameron* with sections from the *Letters to Friends* [*Familiars*] and from the *Lives of Illustrious Men* [*De viris illustribus*] that Petrarch composed after the Black Death.⁸

Historical scholarship has often viewed the *Decameron's* treatment of the Black Death in Florence as a straightforward, objective account of the great disaster: in fact his account has served as the *locus classicus* for the epidemic's virulence and affect on Trecento urban morals.⁹

Cambridge UP, 1988), which stress the "epistemological crisis brought on by the growth and spread of scepticism at the end of the Renaissance" (684). Schmitt notes that Petrarch admired Cicero's sceptical treatise *Academica*, but that its effect on his thinking "was rather meager." See his essay "The Rediscovery of Ancient Scepticism," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983), 229. Mazzotta however (*Worlds of Petrarch*, 83) states that "Socrates' ignorance, which is explicitly Petrarch's own model of knowledge, is to be understood as a philosophical scepticism, as a scepticism toward philosophy's pretentious, dogmatic, and authoritarian assertions." I see, as stated above, the humanist scepticism extending toward *all* objective certainties about historical knowledge, and also about moral knowledge as well, as will be examined later.

⁷ See Julius R. Weinberg, *Nicolaus of Autrecourt* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1948); Gordon Leff, *Gregory of Rimini: Tradition and Innovation in Fourteenth Century Thought* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1961); Anneliese Maier, "Das Problem der Evidenz in der Philosophie des 14. Jahrhunderts," in her *Ausgehendes Mittelalter* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura 1967), 2:367–418. Charles Trinkaus addresses the historical relation between late-medieval scholastics and humanists, but doubts that any "systematic comparison" can be undertaken: see his "The Religious Thought of Italian Humanists" in his *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 241–244.

⁸ This anxiety would be diminished, or masked, in Boccaccio's later works, the 1358–1373 *On the Fall of Famous Men* (*De casibus illustrium virorum*) and the 1361–1362 *On Famous Women* (*De mulieribus claris*), which return to an idea of overcoming misfortune by adhering to virtue, an idea more closely consonant with the mendicant outlook. We shall examine Boccaccio's later works in the concluding chapter.

⁹ Most recently treated so by John Aberth, ed., *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348–1350* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 23–27, Rosemary Horrox, ed., *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), 26–34, and by David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel Cohn, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997). See also Tenenti, "La rappresentazione della morte di massa nel Decameron."

Yet nothing should be taken at face value in a work so given to the ironic statement. Literary commentators for their part have discussed Boccaccio's use of irony and have cited textual antecedents for his plague-narrative. However, these scholars have insufficiently examined the interpretive problems that Boccaccio poses with his narrative, as an independent testimony on the epidemic.¹⁰

Boccaccio's treatment of the plague relies directly on first-person observation in a way that requires its readers to evaluate the credibility of his account. This quality of Boccaccio's narrative, long overlooked, emerges most clearly when we compare his account with that of Villani. Through this comparison, we discover that Villani has adopted a more impersonal standpoint toward the Black Death, by viewing it as a religious *exemplum*, based upon the truths of the prevailing religious doctrine.¹¹

¹⁰ This commentary has typically studied his plague-narrative in relation to the frame-story and the *novelle*, or in relation to earlier treatments of the plague-*topos*. See Jonathan Usher, "Boccaccio's *Ars Moriendi* in the *Decameron*," *Modern Language Review*, 81/3 (1986): 621–632; Aldo S. Bernardo, "The Plague as Key to Meaning in Boccaccio's *Decameron*" in *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague*. Papers of the 11th Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, ed. Daniel Williman (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 39–64; Giovanni Getto, "La peste del 'Decameron' e il problema della fonte Lucreziana," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 135 (1958): 507–523; Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 31–44, 381–387; Pierre Louis Ginguené, *Histoire littéraire d'Italie*, vol. 3 (Milan: P.E. Giusti, 1820), 82–91; Winfried Wehle, "Der Tod, das Leben und die Kunst: Boccaccios *Decameron* oder der Triumph der Sprache," in *Tod im Mittelalter*, 221–255; Joseph E. Germano, "La fonte letteraria della pesta decameroniana: Per una storia della critica delle fonti," *Italian Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1986): 21–30. For a study that places Boccaccio's account in a context of the archival records, see Aliberto Benigno Falsini, "Firenze dopo il 1348. Le conseguenze della peste nera," *Archivio storico italiano* 129 (1971): 425–503, especially 491–2, n. 174. An exception to this trend is Giuseppe Mazzotta's *The World at Play in Boccaccio's "Decameron"* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 18–21, emphasizing Boccaccio's difficulty in making sense of what he sees, and in conveying that difficulty to the reader.

¹¹ I refer here to the understanding of *exemplum* as demonstrated by Giovanni da San Gimignano's *Summa de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum*, Basel 1499 (Hain 7654). For the life and work of Giovanni, see Antoine Dondaine, "La vie et les oeuvres de Jean de San Gimignano," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 9 (1939): 128–183; Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 2:539–543; and more recently Silvana Vecchio's entry in *DBI* 56:206–210. Kaeppli and Vecchio place the date on the *Summa de exemplis* between 1298 and 1314/17, on the funeral sermons as ca. 1325–30.

The subordination of empirical data to spiritual verity was a common interpretation of Jerome's *ep.* 129: "historiae veritatis . . . fundamentum est intelligentiae spiritualis"; cited by Herbert Grundmann, *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965), 5.

Boccaccio's account does not necessarily undermine the worth of Villani's chronicle, but rather puts it—and itself—to the question: to what degree can one—and should one—distinguish between knowledge and belief, or eye-witness and trust in authority, when trying to understand what has happened? As Villani's historical interpretation rests ultimately on a matter of doctrine (divine Judgment), this is a critical issue. This question is addressed in the *Decameron* with far-reaching historiographical and philosophical consequences. If the medieval chronicler focused on historical events as symbols of eschatological verities, humanists, in consonance with classical historians, increasingly devoted themselves to examining contemporary phenomena, apart from their doctrinal meaning.¹² Boccaccio writes about the events he himself could have witnessed. But in a way that announces his new approach to history, distinct from both classical and medieval accounts, he self-consciously demands that the reader create his own evaluation of what the historian asserts to be the historical truth. The reader therefore is complicit in discovering history's value, for his own life and time, and the historian's own perspective becomes a matter for scrutiny.

For Villani, the meaning of the history of the plague is obvious if one sees these events for what they actually are, if one avoids, in terms of contemporary Dominican thought, clouding one's reason with sinful desire. Behind Boccaccio's telling of this history there lies a different ethic. The plague's fury is so awesome and frightening to his eyes that there can be no objective frame of reference for the observer that is secure from the emotional distress of these events. Rather than appearing to maintain a narrative detachment from the suffering and confusion of the plague's victims, Boccaccio suggests instead that his viewpoint is informed by intimately understanding the distress, indeed by living through it himself. Boccaccio's perspective, schooled by compassion, focuses on the states of mind at this time—both his fellow Florentines' and as his own. Unlike Villani, he is conscious of how the historical moment, which confronts each individual with the finality of his destiny, determines not only the field of vision and behavior of the historical actors, but also the per-

¹² This devotion to contemporary history obviously characterizes the work of Mussato and Ferreto. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Tradition and the Classical Historian," *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1977), 162–166.

ceptions of those who record their actions and, by extension, of those who read the record. In Boccaccio's account of the plague's mortality we recognize the nascent breakthrough to a different ontology, in which the individual exists unremittingly in the flux of his passing from his birth toward his death. Human existence first becomes historical in an authentic sense, when it is grasped as finite and temporal. What lends meaning to the history of the plague for Boccaccio is not an ecclesiastical interpretation of the events, but rather the awareness of what Heidegger would call the *Geschichtlichkeit* ["historicality"] of human existence.¹³ These aspects of Boccaccio's approach to understanding history—the subjective, the psychological, and what we now conceive as the ontological, how human existence, and one's knowledge of it, are conditioned by time—together represent a new phase in historiography, a phase introduced through the terror of the Black Death.

The plague for Boccaccio thus becomes more than a moment for meditating one's mortality. It has philosophical meaning. Throughout the *Decameron*, beginning with his description of the Black Death, Boccaccio ponders the relation between anxiety and freedom. As he sees it, the suddenness of the plague has suspended the Florentines in the realm of chance, confronting them with the power of fortune, which appears to govern everything except the certainty of death. In the tension between one's insecure life and one's certain end, new choices emerge for living and thinking, which are not indebted to the dictates of dogma. Boccaccio, like Petrarch, uses the advent of the plague to break from the medieval metaphysical certainties and describe a world characterized by new freedoms, but correspondingly

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), ¶72–75, especially p. 428: “*In analysing the historicality of Dasein we shall try to show that this entity is not ‘temporal’ because it ‘stands in history,’ but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being*” (Heidegger’s italics). See also George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 79 and William J. Richardson, S.J., *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 90–93. Steiner’s comment (63) is of interest: “Whereas the latter [all post-Socratic philosophic discourse] arrives, inherently, at the inference of the transcendent, at the attempt to locate truth and ethical values in some abstract “beyond,” Heidegger’s ontology is densely immanent. Being is being-in-the-world. There ‘is’ nowhere else. Being and authenticity can only be realized within immanent existence and time.” Heidegger does not discuss the historical starting point of the new conception of ontology. What is aimed at in this chapter is the character of this ontology in the Trecento.

new anxieties and fewer securities. Unlike the earlier humanists, Boccaccio announces a conception of human action and self-perception, one which starts from a deep sense of the finitude of human existence and upholds the dialectical relation between ontological anxiety and moral freedom.¹⁴

This dialectical relation also embraces, for Boccaccio, the interpretation of historical events by both writer and reader: the understanding of historical truth only occurs in the realm of subjectivity, precisely in one's own awareness of the historicity of one's existence. Subjectivity of understanding is not to be confused here with relativity. Truth by definition remains objective, while the human degree of apprehending it is subjective, ruled as it is by the fluctuating measure of life experience, ability, and outward circumstances. Boccaccio and Petrarch are uncommonly concerned with the situation of both writer and reader, in their dialogue with one another, and this concern leaves its mark on their own relation to their classical predecessors.

For even though Boccaccio's historical method is new, it also represents a return to the forms of classical historiography, in which the historian is reticent to interpret events within a preconceived moral context.¹⁵ In fact the similarity between the plague accounts

¹⁴ Thus Boccaccio's humanism, though in some sense a progression from Mussato and Ferreto, markedly differs from theirs, as it does also from the orientation of Marsilius of Padua. The works of these writers do not express as keenly the consciousness of human finitude, nor focus upon it as a central theme. In the *Decameron*, one can follow the awareness of the plague throughout the work: see the opening actions of the story-tellers IX.intro.2-4.

¹⁵ In this regard as well Boccaccio, in his account of the plague, outdistances his humanist predecessors Mussato and Ferreto. Cf. Ferreto, *Historia rerum in Italia gestarum* (Proemium) in Ferreto de' Ferreti, *Le Opere*, ed. Carlo Cipolla, vol. 1 (Rome: Istituto Storico Romano, 1908), 4: "non enim ob hoc nati sumus, ut belluarum more degentes, corporeis voluptatibus obsequamur, sed ut Deo primum et nobis, deinde ceteris, accurate laborantes, bene agendo et consulendo, laudabilem vite memoriam relinquamus. que quidem non opibus aut potentia decoratur, non rapinis aut animi sordibus illustratur, sed in lege Domini meditans iustus, per virtutis semitam ambulando, vivit in seculum. . . ." Aside from the more religious turns of expression in Mussato's later work (see, for example, his Preface to *De traditione Paduae ad Canem Grandem anno 1328*, written 1329), we may note Mussato's treatment of the outbreak of plague in Brescia in 1312: "Sed hic instat memoranda è summo Caelo demissa pestis exemplo carens ab omni rerum memoria, seu irati Dei plaga in emeritum genus humano ex iudicio addicta fuerit, seu causantibus equorum a primordio cadaveribus extra stativas Castrorum Cesaris abiectis . . . in corpora humana defluxit [*sic*] Epidimia ad cordiales radices penetrans, tamque lethales morbos inferens, ut infectis nulla salutis remedia comperirentur. . . ." *Historia augusta*, lib.4 rub.v, p. 23. The relation between Mussato and Boccaccio's plague accounts, to my knowledge, has

of Boccaccio and Thucydides led early Boccaccio scholars to suspect that Boccaccio knew the Athenian's writings.¹⁶ Although this assertion is now called into doubt, we should still recognize the affinity present in their approaches as an essential feature of mid-Trecento culture, and its importance is illuminated by Petrarch's own anxious examination of his originality and the influences on his writing.

This kinship between Boccaccio and Thucydides can be seen first of all in their style of historical writing. Like Thucydides, Boccaccio describes events and their causes and effects in a way that relies on antithetical phrasing, contrasts or differentiations, for example men and women, clergy and laity, eyewitness and hearsay.¹⁷ The use of antithesis makes Boccaccio's account seem both more comprehensive and more inconclusive than that of Villani. It details a longer list of historical actors, but in so doing makes it more difficult for the reader to maintain a monocular vantage point toward the plague, as Villani strives to do. The variety of perspectives developed by Boccaccio's antithetical style creates a type of internal dialogue and demonstrates his scepticism about knowing the actual origin of historical events, in the awareness of the limited, subjective quality of human knowledge. Boccaccio's plague-story therefore places the reader in the position of determining its validity in light of his or her self-understanding.

Considering the question of style, one might ask how the *Decameron* may be analyzed as a significant document in Trecento historiography. For is it not, first and foremost, a literary creation? Is not identifying its historical method an act complicated, indeed vitiated, by its genre as 'literature'? A creative work, to be sure, needs to be assessed in its own terms. And in fact the *Decameron's* very nature, as well as

not been recognized. Mussato also emphasizes the terror unleashed by the disease and the devastating social consequences, though without Boccaccio's differentiations: "*Quique supererant ante oculos instantis mortis imaginibus terrebantur. Deficientibus namque locis Sacris, quae Cimeteria vocant, in publicis viis corpora sepeliebantur, sicque extra et citra moenia Civitatis ubique fletus et dolor: moeror siquidem superstitibus morientum, urgensque capitalis belli saevitia, cum pene omni die homicidia, vulnera, rapinae, et caetera hostilia undique circa moenia committerentur.*" *Loc. cit.*, my emphasis. It is interesting that the vernacular chronicler Giovanni Villani treats the 1312 epidemic as a natural occurrence outside of a moral religious context: see his *Cronica*, ed. Francesco Gherardi Dragomanni, vol. 2 (Florence: S. Coen, 1845), cap. 20, p. 158.

¹⁶ See Pierre Louis Ginguené, *Histoire littéraire d'Italie*, 3:82–91. For an overview of the scholarship, see Joseph E. Germano, "La fonte letteraria della pesta decameroniana."

¹⁷ See Robert Hollander's consideration of antithesis in the Proem in his *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, 96.

its opening pages, ask for the reader's historical understanding. In contrast to the *Novellino*, the Duecento collection of stories, the *Decameron* forces an historical setting upon its reader. Along with Boccaccio and his ten young story-tellers (the *brigata*), the reader must traverse the plague-infected streets of Florence in 1348 before departing with the *brigata* from the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella. To drive home the palpable gloom and despair and chaos in the urban center, Boccaccio tells of the plague's effects not once, in his own words, but also a second time, in the voice of Pampinea, who stands out as the leader of the *brigata* and the Queen of the First Day's events beyond the city.¹⁸

The choice of the Dominican church for the *brigata*'s point of departure from Florence would have struck Boccaccio's contemporary reader as significant. Between 1346 and 1350, the Preaching Friars were concerned with building their new chapterhouse in the church, which, compared with the building's older structure, must have struck many Florentines as grandiose and ostentatious.¹⁹ The Dominicans were the most voluble preachers of mid-Trecento Florence, likely to be heard by Villani and Boccaccio, and the writers' immediate audience.²⁰ The very language of Tuscan vernacular prose was being formed at this time by layman and cleric alike. Domenico Cavalca and Jacopo Passavanti, among other mendicants, were composing spiritual and pastoral treatises in the vernacular. Similarly Giordano da Pisa (†1311) and Taddeo Dini (†1356), in their sermons, were addressing the concerns of their congregations in a popular way. It is therefore critical for our understanding of the cultural crisis

¹⁸ Intro. 53–72. This second account of the plague reinforces Boccaccio's use of subjective perspective.

¹⁹ See Julian Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapterhouse Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," *Art History* 2, no. 2 (June 1979): 109–114. Gardner notes: "Such size [of the chapterhouse] was hardly necessitated by the attendance at chapters. Rather it is symptomatic of a taste for, or at least an acquiescence in, ostentation in the Dominican community of Florence and in the Order as a whole. . . ." (114). Gardner estimates the size of the community at Santa Maria Novella at one hundred and forty in the decade before 1348; of this number the plague killed about sixty friars and *conversi* (112). Contrast this estimate with that of Falsini, who arrives at the number of eighty-six deaths out of a community of one hundred and thirty: the necrologue Fr. Paolo Bilenchi records "fere due partes hominum decesserunt." Falsini, 434 n. 30.

²⁰ Consider Giordano da Pisa, Bartolomeo da San Concordio, Domenico Cavalca, Taddeo Dini, Giovanni da San Gimignano, and Jacopo Passavanti: all members of this order active in Tuscany in the first half of the fourteenth century.

of this time, at the transition between late-medieval and Renaissance Italy, to determine to what degree ecclesiastical terminology and the conception of salvation history are present in the writings of Villani and Boccaccio.

This cultural crisis may be more clearly outlined through the words of Herbert Grundmann in his *Medieval Historiography*:

Yet [medieval historiography] remains embraced by the conviction that all earthly things order themselves in a whole that is easily surveyed from beginning to end. Only where the conception of the cosmos breaks its bonds in time and space, and one's view extends backwards and forwards as well as outwards into the infinite and the uncertain, does the medieval period, which understood itself as the end-time, come to a close; and man must reflect differently upon his place in the continual flow of history, also research and portray his own history differently, insofar as its witness and experiences are able to provide him with certainty and insight according to human measure.²¹

In his account of the Black Death, Villani struggles to uphold the moral certainty of theology, and to view the pestilence as a sign of the ecclesiastical end-time, of the close of the world. For him this physical disaster is a symbol of spiritual disorder. Yet our examination highlights not only the certainty behind his historiographical perspective, but also his struggle to maintain his point of view, a struggle he shared with his Dominican contemporaries. By contrast, this doctrinal determinacy is missing in Boccaccio and Petrarch. For the unremitting flow of time, in their eyes, affects every perception of historical events, as it conditions the brief modulations of existence, and permits no observation to be determined as objective, outside the mind of the perceiver. The introspective turning of Boccaccio and Petrarch, bearing with it as of necessity an inherent scepticism toward all received, authoritative forms of knowledge, was accelerated by the plague, and remained a crucial part of its legacy.

²¹ Grundmann, *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter* 75: "Immer aber bleibt sie [die Geschichtsschreibung] umfassen von der Überzeugung, daß alles Irdische sich einordnet in ein von Anfang bis Ende überschaubares Ganze. Erst wo das Weltbild in Zeit und Raum sich entgrenzt und der Blick nach vor- und rückwärts wie nach außen ins Grenzenlose und Ungewisse geht, hört das Mittelalter auf, das sich als Endzeit begriff, und der Mensch muß sich anders auf seine Stellung in der weitergehenden Geschichte besinnen, anders auch seine eigene Geschichte erforschen und darstellen, soweit ihm ihre Zeugnisse und Erfahrungen nach menschlichem Ermessen Gewissheit und Einsicht geben können."

Matteo Villani's brother, Giovanni, left his *Nuova cronica* incomplete when he died of the 1348 pestilence. Matteo begins the *Cronica* where his brother's *Nuova cronica* ended. For Matteo Villani the Black Death thus becomes the subject of his first chapter. But it is also the setting of a larger announcement. As in the opening of the *Decameron*—and in Petrarch's initial letter in the *Familiare*s—the chronicler dwells on the “unheard-of loss of life” [*inaudita mortalità*] in order to establish his theme and purpose. Yet Villani, unlike the humanists, derives a meaning for the cataclysm from a larger framework of religious verity.

Villani expressly states that he seeks to enlighten a present readership about “dire matters” [*grave cose*], including the plague,

of which people, in coming times, as if surprised by ignorance, will be more strongly amazed, the less they comprehend the divine judgment [*il divino giudizio*], and they will little know the counsel and remedy for adversity, unless they have some instruction [*amaestramento*] through the memory of similar occurrences from past times. . . .²²

The statement underlines the moral and doctrinal import of what Villani considers historical knowledge or ignorance. Villani sees willful ignorance of history as the enemy of religious knowledge, in a manner similar to that of contemporary Tuscan Dominicans. The way in which Villani uses the term *amaestramento*—instruction or teaching—is consistent with its use in Dominican treatises, for example in the *Teachings of the Ancients* [*Amaestramenti degli antichi*] of Bartolomeo da San Concordio.²³ Not knowing the lesson of the plague, not understanding its *amaestramento*, he states, makes men stupidified; it dulls their awareness of God's judgment and weakens still more the means to come to terms with adversity.

True instruction from history shows how God acts with justice and mercy toward human frailty, and this lesson should lead the

²² Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1995), 3–4; Intro., lines 15–21 (hereafter cited Intro.15–21): “. . . delle quali gli uomini, ne' cui tempi avvengono, quasi da ignoranza sopresi, più forte si maravigliono, e meno comprendono il divino giudizio, e poco conoscono il consiglio, e i rimedio dell'avversità, si per memoria di simiglianti casi avvenuti ne' tempi passati non hanno alcuno amaestramento. . . .”

²³ *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, ed. by P.J. Fraticelli (Florence: P. Fraticelli, 1846), 13–14: “Ma perché la beata sapienza degli antichi in uno piccolo libro non si potea comprendere tutta, almeno per parte, cioè alquanti loro ammaestramenti, avendo curato di raccogliere in questa operetta. . . .”

reader to seek relief by conducting himself piously, or as Matteo states, “with effort and zeal to achieve virtuous actions.”²⁴ History should call to mind a type of generalized knowledge that the way of mortals is fraught with sin. But this lesson is lost when people ‘suffer’ prosperity. As Matteo finishes his sentence:

. . . [people in coming times will be amazed] if they do not know how to use the appropriate temperance in those things which the shining face of prosperity offers, and instead hide under the dark veil of ignorance the ephemeral passing and dubious end of all mortal things.²⁵

According to Villani’s metaphor, his contemporaries too often become dazzled by prosperity’s shining surface, and they conceal reality from themselves under the dark cover of ignorance. What truly lies beneath the glimmering surface is death, the penalty for sin and the figure of damnation. The survivors of the plague should have accepted their preservation as a sign of God’s grace, as an occasion for becoming, he says, “humble, virtuous, and Catholic” (VI.8: *umili, virtudiosi, cattolici*). Instead, people have quickly forgotten the past troubles and enjoyed the sudden surplus of goods. In Villani’s words: “they began a more indecent and shameless way of life which they previously had not practiced. . . . running wildly without restraint to lust, finding in foreign clothes both unusual fashions and shameless manners, altering with new ways the style of dress they had previously known. . . .”²⁶ Villani’s problem is to convince his readers, who have

²⁴ Intro.32–33; pp. 4–5: “con fatica e studio, da potere venire a operazioni virtudiose. . . .”

²⁵ Intro.21–25; p. 4: “. . . e in quelle che la chiara faccia della prosperità rapporta non sanno usare il debito temperamento; rischiudendo sotto lo scuro velo della ignoranza l’uscimento cadevole e il fino dubbioso delle mortale cose.”

²⁶ VI.14–15, 18–21; p. 16: “. . . si dierono a ppiù [*sic*] sconcia e disonesta vita che prima non avieno usata. . . . scorrendo alla lussuria senza freno, trovando ne’ vestimenti strane e disusate fogge e disoneste maniere, mutando nuove forme a tutti li arredi.” Cf. “disordinata vita” as variant; nota al testo, civ. It is worth comparing here the more deeply dialectical frame of mind of Petrarch’s *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune* (*De remediis utriusque fortune*). Unlike the *Cronica*, the *Remedies* sees misfortune both as a potential cause for despair, and also as a ground for humility. See for example the dialogue II.89 between Sorrow and Reason on “being depressed by the ways of the world” (“De dolore malis ex hominum moribus concepto”) in *De remediis utriusque fortune*, ed. Christophe Carraud, 2 vols. (Grenoble: Millon, 2002), I:924–926; English edition and translation as *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul* by Conrad Rawski, 5 vols. (Bloomington, Ind. 1991: Indiana UP), 2:207–208. That Villani sees no morally justifiable alternatives other than humility in humanity’s response to the disaster separates his account from that of Petrarch, and from that

survived this outbreak of divine wrath, that they still merit punishment. But can history still be understood to possess metaphysical meaning after the plague, or has doctrine been superseded by the very events it attempts to explain?

Villani takes pains to deny the plague's threat to salvation history. With a sense for historical cycles within the story of God's way with humanity, he accounts the Black Death as the latest and greatest divine retribution for sin. The first sentence of his first chapter recalls the Deluge, and then, after reviewing the major outbreaks of disease of the Roman Empire, he establishes the enormity of the recent disaster. It is for him a presentiment of the Reckoning:

But whatever one can find in the writings (since the Flood), nothing had the universal sentence of mortality ["universale giudicio di mortalità"] that so encompassed the entire world [*l'universo*] as that which came in our day.²⁷

The phrase "universal sentence of mortality" has both a particular historical meaning and a general religious one as an *exemplum* or symbol. "[T]he mind falters," he writes, "when recording the sentence that the divine justice issued with great mercy upon mankind, which was worthy of the final judgment through the corruption of sin."²⁸ Villani views 1348 as a turning point in history, not simply

of Boccaccio. His idea of 'universal' knowledge is quite different from the individualized self-knowledge highlighted by Boccaccio and Petrarch, just as Boccaccio's form of "useful counsel" in his Preface assumes also a fundamentally non-doctrinal character. See Proem. 14: "Nelle quali novelle piacevole e aspri casi d'amore a altri fortunatie avvenimenti si vederanno così ne' moderni tempi avvenuti come negli antichi; delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, parimente diletto delle sollazzovoli cose in quelle mostrate e utile consiglio potranno pigliare. . . ." The distinction here in the *Decameron's* Proem between "modern" and "ancient" time periods is one typically employed by the humanists, e.g. in Petrarch's *Rerum memorandarum*.

²⁷ I.25–29; p. 6: "Ma per quello, che trovare si possa per le scritture (dal generale diluvio in quà) non ha universale giudicio di mortalità che tanto compredesse l'universo, come quella che ne' nostri di avvenne." In Louis Green's translation of the passage, he misses the word play ("universal judgment of the plague so all-embracing"). He also truncates the quotation, omitting the classical histories. It is important to note Villani's awareness of classical history, forming as it does a link to humanism and to the education of the mid-Trecento. Louis Green, *Chronicle into History: An Essay on the Interpretation of History in Florentine Fourteenth-century Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), 44.

²⁸ II.3–7; p. 8: ". . . stupidisce la mente apressandosi a scriver la sentenza, che lla divina giustizia co molta misericordia mandò sopra li uomini, degni per la curruzione del peccato di finale giudicio."

as a citizen-observer of social events, nor as an aspiring political actor, but as one prodded by a foreboding of the Apocalypse. For he has taken up the *Cronica* at his brother's death in order to leave a register of "new events" in the wake of the Black Death.

[I] have set my mind to start with the multiple and disastrous events of ours at this time, as a renewal of time and of the world ["rinovellamento di tempo e secolo"], annually including the new events that appear worthy of recording. . . .²⁹

This "renewal" [*rinovellamento*] should not be interpreted to mean for Villani simply the dawn of a new cultural era, or of a social or political recovery, which is a reading scholars such as Louis Green and Marga Cottino-Jones have put forth.³⁰ It must be understood in the Biblical post-diluvian framework that he introduces at the chapter's outset: the term rather suggests a regeneration of human activity after the sentence of death, waste, and devastation.

Given Villani's frame of reference, "renewal" is likely a category which he is adapting to contemporary events from the liturgical significance of Advent. In his Prologue to the *Golden Legend*, the Dominican Jacopo da Varagine explains that Advent begins the liturgical year because it represents a "time of renewal" ["tempo di rinovellamento"].³¹ The Advent of the Lord could also be interpreted eschatologically: it reminds the pious of the Last Judgment. Jacopo outlines the signs of the Judgment, the final one being a "storm of fire":

²⁹ I.39–44; p. 7: "[Io] proposui nell'animo mio fare alla nostra varia e calamitosa materia cominciamento a questo tempo, come a uno rinovellamento di tempo e secolo, comprendendo annualmente le novità, che appariranno di memoria degne. . . ."

³⁰ See Green, *Chronicle into History*, 44–45: "The Black Death, like the Flood, became for him one of those epochal turning-points in history which did not so much change its course as alter the character of the resultant age. . . . If there is not much sign of a renewal of time and of the world in his gloomy account of events, at least there is a sense of severance from the past, a tendency to re-examine the realities of the situation in the wake of the all-transforming shock of the plague." Also Marga Cottino-Jones, in her *Order from Chaos: Social and Aesthetic Harmonies in Boccaccio's "Decameron"* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 4–5, mentions how Villani viewed the Plague "apocalyptically," but discusses the "renewal" only as a "trend toward recovery" in economic, social, and political terms.

³¹ Beato Iacopo da Varagine, *Leggenda aurea: Volgarizzamento toscano del trecento*, ed. Arrigo Levasti, 3 vols. (Florence: Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1924–1926), 1:5: ". . . per lo avvenimento di Cristo tutte le cose sono rinnovate; per la qual cosa questo tempo è detto tempo di rinovellamento, sì com'è scritto ne l'Apocallisi. . . ."

God will send this fire, firstly for the renewal of the world [“per rinovelare il mondo”]; he will purge and renew all the elements.³²

The scourge of the plague would accord with the ultimate phase of salvation history. Its ravages, he emphasizes, are universal and global. This investigation by Villani thus confirmed his thesis that the calamity’s effect was akin to the Deluge or the Apocalypse: “And in general throughout the entire world the human race vanished in a similar number and way, according to the reports that we have from many strange lands and from many provinces of the world.”³³

Along with lives, morals were lost as well. Villani introduces the distinction between Christians and non-Christians if only to admit reluctantly that the Church’s faithful, as if infected by the immorality of the heathen, treated one another no better:

Among the infidels [*infideli*] there began this cruel inhumanity: mothers and fathers abandoned their children, and children their fathers and mothers . . . something cruel and astonishing and very foreign to human nature, detested by the Christian faithful [*fideli*], among whom, nevertheless, following the way of barbarous nations, such a cruelty took root.³⁴

Believers and unbelievers were alike in their immoral reaction, and Florence, the center of his chronicle, failed to provide an exception to these trends. Its citizens were caught up in the widespread decline and fall: “And without any hesitation almost our entire city fell into shamelessness [*disonesta vita*]: and in such manner, and worse, than

³² *Leggenda aurea*, 1:9: “E quel fuoco manderà il Signore primieramente per rinovelare il mondo. Egli pugherà e rinovellerà gli elementi. . . .”

³³ III.16–20; p. 14: “E nel generale per tutto il mondo mancò la generazione umana per simigliante numero e modo, secondo le novelle ch’avemmo di molti paesi strani e di molte province del mondo.” Villani eventually cites Genoese merchants and a Florentine Franciscan, men “degni di fede,” who had more direct reports from Asia (IV; pp. 14–15). From its onset the pestilence affected “li uomini d’ogni condizione de catuna èta e sesso,” with the infection spreading to those who sought to comfort them, so that they “morivano per somigliante modo” (II.23–24, 29–30; p. 9). The disease came to Italy by way of trade, first affecting the Sicilians, according to “il tempo ordinato da dDio a’ paesi” (II.52–54; p. 10). Villani traces how it marched through the Mediterranean, Africa, Italy, and across the Alps, in the course of time reaching northern Europe.

³⁴ II.86–92; p. 12: “Tra li infideli cominciò questa inumanità crudele, che lle madri e’ padri abbandonovano i figliuoli, e i figliuoli i padri e lle madri . . . cosa crudele e meravigliosa, e molto strana dalla umana natura, ditestata tra’ fedeli cristiani, ne’ quali seguendo le nazioni barbare, questa crudeltà si trovò.” A textual variant is “seguendo le nazioni barbari e infideli.” See nota al testo, civ.

any other city or province in the world.”³⁵ Many Florentines had quarantined themselves, avoiding all contact with the sick.³⁶ After having lived through the plague, the surviving townspeople, like all other inhabitants of the known earth, were busy in pleasure, “supposing God’s hand to be tired.”³⁷

Villani’s claim of moral turpitude deserving of punishment has once again a Dominican context. *The Golden Legend* consistently interprets the outbreak of pestilence as a spiritual retribution for human immorality. The most striking references are to the plague that struck Rome in 590:

The Romans, having lived a continent and abstemious life throughout Lent and having received the Body of the Lord at Easter, afterwards threw off all restraints in fasting, in games, and in voluptuous living. Therefore God, offended by these excesses, sent a devastating plague upon them. . . .³⁸

The procession organized by Gregory, Jacopo tells us, appeased God’s wrath. The marchers sang the litany and carried an image of Mary, believed to be the portrait by Saint Luke, which dispersed “the poisonous uncleanness of the air.” Angels’ voices were heard taking part in the chanting, and Gregory, upon seeing a holy angel wiping and sheathing his sword, knew the plague was over.³⁹

Villani, unlike Boccaccio, is remarkably silent on the subject of processions. And in fact the way Villani describes people’s behavior *after* the plague, who rushed “wildly without restraint to lust,” who supposed “God’s hand to be tired,” sounds similar to Jacopo’s characterization of the Romans *before* the pestilence of 590, who “threw off all restraints in feasting, in games, and in voluptuous living.” Clearly the harmony between God and his people, which is so beautifully evoked by the angels’ chanting with Gregory, was not restored by the fall of 1348. What has happened?

³⁵ VI.26–29; pp. 16–17: “E sanza alcun ritegno quasi tutta la nostra città scorse alla disonesta vita; e così, e peggio, l’altre città e provincie del mondo. . . .”

³⁶ II.94–99; p. 12. Yet Villani notes with satisfaction that these were often struck down by divine justice, while those serving the sick were spared (lines 99–106; p. 12), an assertion in conflict with his discussion of how the disease was spread.

³⁷ VI.31–32: “stimando la mano di Dio essere stanca.”

³⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 1:286 [70. The Greater and Lesser Litanies].

³⁹ *Golden Legend*, 1:174 [46. Saint Gregory].

It is no wonder if Villani tells us his “mind falters when recording the sentence” issued by God upon humanity. For, if we read the *Golden Legend*’s story as a prime *exemplum* of salvation history, then, with respect to the Black Death, the *exemplum* must be revised, for the moral interplay between clergy and laity and between God and humankind has gone awry. People, Villani claims, are too hard-hearted, too resistant to the moral instruction that the clergy and he would provide, both during and after the plague; and yet the plague subsided. Could not the aftermath of the Black Death of 1348, in contrast to the one of 590, have led many to question the traditional claim of a cosmic moral design and to look elsewhere for the knowledge of ultimate causes?

Warning his readers against surmising other, non-doctrinal reasons for the plague’s genesis, Villani emphasizes how the divine judgment transcends all human acuity or foresight. God’s high purview of human destiny, he claims, outweighs the astrological explanations for the plague that were then current. There have been similar conjunctions of planets in the past without this terrible result; therefore “. . . the influence [of this conjunction] exerted through other particular accidents [i.e. concomitant events] does not seem to be the cause of this occurrence, but on the contrary the divine judgment according to the disposition of the absolute will of God.”⁴⁰

Although Petrarch would also criticize the astrologers, Villani’s reasoning is more closely related to ecclesiastical sources: the writings of the Dominican preachers Jacopo Passavanti and Giordano da Pisa. Like Villani, his Dominican counterparts had to re-consider, within the limits of doctrine, the extent of human knowledge of historical causes. Alongside the traditional Dominican emphasis on knowledge, Villani and the friars qualify their sense of the strength of human reasoning in a way that carries more Franciscan, especially Ockhamist overtones.

⁴⁰ II.10–20; pp. 8–9: “la infuenza per altri particolari accidenti no parve cagione di questa, ma più tosto divino giudizio secondo la disposizione della assoluta volontà di Dio.” Here Matteo may be commenting on Giovanni Villani’s understanding of the 1340 Plague in Florence, an understanding which emphasized the astrological signs of the pestilence. See Giovanni’s *Cronica*, v.11, ch. 114. Cf. also, with regard to the Black Death, the 1350 account of Gilles li Muisis, Abbot of St. Giles at Tournai; the reports of the Paris medical faculty in October 1348; Simon de Covino’s *De Iudicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni* of 1350; and the statement of the astrologer Geoffrey de Meaux, cited by Horrox, ed., *The Black Death*, 48, 158–172. Both Gilles le Muisis (48) and Simon de Covino (166) mention astrologers who predicted the catastrophe.

In his *Mirror of True Penitence*, composed shortly after the Black Death as a compilation of his sermons,⁴¹ Passavanti also proclaims the primacy of the divine will in causing historical events, beyond any astronomical calculations. The alignment of the planets may foretell a drought, he says, but God, “who can do all things that he wants to do,” may reveal a forthcoming rain in “a good person’s” dream. There are dreams that are “revelations from God which he makes according to his hidden will.”⁴² God’s will is essentially inscrutable.

On a more mundane level, Passavanti sees further evidence for the weakness of human knowledge in its failure to comprehend the inner workings of nature and natural occurrences, asserting that “. . . not only the secrets of God, but also certain secrets and hidden things of nature remain unknown to men, no matter how wise, learned and expert they may be: for if they did know these things, they could bear many evils of death, of sicknesses and of other dangers, which others would shun.”⁴³ After the plague’s advent, this ignorance would have been apparent to Passavanti’s listeners and readers. While scrupulously avoiding the subject of the plague, he cannot help but testify to the epistemological crisis that the plague must have catalyzed for his Order, devoted as it was to instruction, preaching and rational understanding.

Among his fellow Dominicans, Giordano da Pisa also addressed the Transcendent character of divine election and rejection. Preaching on the feast-day of St. James the Greater, Giordano cautions against astrological explanations, and more generally against the reliance on the human *ratio*:

If you were to say why God made this fellow handsome and not ugly, this cannot be perceived nor known by reason. But you will say: ‘I know this for a fact: that he was handsome because he had a beautiful

⁴¹ Passavanti wrote the treatise in 1354; *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 6 (Preface). See also Mulchahey, “First the Bow,” 446. For a recent source for Passavanti’s life, see Giorgio Varanini and Guido Baldassarri, ed., *Racconti esemplari di predicatori del due e trecento*, 3 vols. (Rome: Salerno, 1993), 2:521–526.

⁴² *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 339: “che puote tutto ciò che vuole,” “una buona persona,” “revelations da dio lequali egli fa secondo la sua occulta volonta.”

⁴³ *Specchio*, 340: “E non ch’è segreti di Dio, ma pure certe cose segrete e occulte della natura non sanno gli uomini, quantunque sieno savi, dotti, e sperti: chè se le sapessono, molto mali di morti, d’infermità e d’altri pericoli si sostengono, ch’altri gli schiferebbe.”

mother and handsome father and was conceived at a planetary conjunction and thus had honors and so many other benefits.' I tell you it was nothing of the sort. It were well that you gave up such arguments. I tell you that you could neither determine nor investigate any of these things. This question is forbidden and obscure. . . . This is a deep ocean.⁴⁴

Giordano, in this vernacular homiletic dialogue, repeats his warning about the laity's investigations of ultimate causes, so insistent, we may assume, are their queries. Regarding God's special favor to James among the Apostles, Giordano states that "it is simply from the goodness of God; just as among the two brothers Jacob and Esau it is clearly stated that God loved the one and beheld the other with hatred. This boundless depth cannot be sounded by our knowledge."⁴⁵

These Dominican avowals of God's Transcendent will, and of the limits of human reason, may have left their trace on Villani's thoughts about the plague's genesis. When Villani claims that the cause of the plague is not due to planetary conjunctions, "but on the contrary [to] divine judgment according to the disposition of the absolute

⁴⁴ "Settu dicessi perche a idio fatto cosi bello colui e no cosi sozzo questo mai non puo vedere ne sapere daragione. Or tu diresti si so bene: pero fu bello chebbe bella madre e bello padre e fu conceputo in punto celestiale edebe lonore acioncio acio olatre cose: Respondeti non di nulla. Ben ti confesso contesto. Dicoti che di questo non potrei trovare ne investigare nulla. Vietato e profonda questa questione. . . . questo e un gran pelago." "Sermo beati Jacobi maioris: 'Iuste vocatum est nomen eius Jacob.'" MS Biblioteca Nazionale Firenze, FN II.VIII.35 (sec. xiv), 56v. This and two other vernacular sermons by Giordano were attributed to Passavanti's contemporary Taddeo Dini and are found in this fourteenth-century collection of Dini's sermons. See Carlo Delcorno, "Prediche di Giordano da Pisa attribuite a Taddeo Dini," in *Xenia medii aevi historiam illustrantia, oblata Thomae Kaeppli OP*, ed. Raymond Creytens and Pius Künzle (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1978), 1:417-443. Quéatif and Échard cite Dini's year of death as 1359: Jacques Quéatif and Jacques Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum recensiti*, edited by Remi Coulon and Antoine Papillon (Louvain: Bibliotheca Societatis Jesu, 1961), 1:647b. Delcorno suggests dates for the collection between 1319 and 1352: "Ci troviamo dinnanzi a un sermonario ad uso privato, messo disordinatamente assieme con materiali presumibilmente derivati dalle carte di fra Taddeo. . . ." (422). For praise of Dini, which may explain the inclusion of these sermons under his name, Quéatif and Échard quote Michele Poccianti in his *Catalogus scriptorum florentinorum*: "Multa milia sermonum ad omnem materiam elegantium et eruditorum, qui per ordinem non tantum nostrum, sed et per alios diffusi tanquam gemma pretiosa asservantur." See also Johannes Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350*, 11 vols. (Münster Aschendorff, 1969-1990), 5:519-523.

⁴⁵ "e se tu dicessi onde viene questo amore questo viene dalla benignita didio. si come ne due fratelli jacob edesau si manifesta che dice che dio amo luno e laltro ebbe inodio. questo profondo non si puo cognoscere." 56r-56v.

will of God,” he repeats for a third time in his chronicle his consideration of “divine judgment.” But he now appends an important qualification: God’s “absolute will,” a phrase not unlike the “hidden will” of Passavanti, if with a more explicit Ockhamist ring. For Villani, however, this sense of God’s unknowable will stood in uneasy alliance with his historical understanding of the plague as a moral retribution. Unlike earlier in his chronicle, where he attempted to correct one’s ignorance by explaining the ultimate causes of historical events, he now emphasizes how little we can comprehend God’s sublime, absolute volition.⁴⁶ We should know, he writes, that a feckless humanity is deserving of judgment. If the divine means to this end are ultimately hidden from our view, there remains no reason for doubting God’s justice.

Villani appraises the wickedness of his age, considering this wickedness something to be endured and combated in order to avoid instability and, ultimately, divine retribution.⁴⁷ God’s hand, he says at the close, is active and quick, and seeks to recall sinners to “conversion and penitence, and punish them in moderation.”⁴⁸ Boccaccio recounts the same events of the plague of 1348, also emphasizing the disorder and misconduct, but radically parts company with his fellow citizen in terms of the focus of his narrative, and in the style and method he uses to narrate these events. As a result he introduces a new way of writing history, one based upon a more thoroughly sceptical view of human knowledge.

First of all, in terms of the scope of his presentation of the Black Death, Boccaccio restricts himself to the city of Florence. In departing from Villani’s panoramic, macrocosmic view of the plague’s course, Boccaccio emphasizes his own eye-witness as a source of this authority. Villani, by contrast, never refers to his personal experience when describing the advance of the disease. Boccaccio’s view of the catastrophe’s nature is through the smaller world, a world in which, he tells his readers, he has walked and seen many astonishing sights:

⁴⁶ See Green, *Chronicle into History*, 59–67, for references to Villani’s interest in astrological influences.

⁴⁷ According to Louis Green, Villani’s *Cronica* deserves recognition for these qualities that distinguish his account from those of other chroniclers, including that of his brother Giovanni; see Green, *Chronicle into History*, 84–85.

⁴⁸ VI.35–36; p. 17: “. . . per ritrarre i peccatori a conversione e penitenzia, e punisce temperatamente.”

It is an amazing thing to hear what I must say, so much so that if it had not been seen by the eyes of many people and by my own, I would hardly dare to believe it, let alone record it, even though I had heard it from a trustworthy person.⁴⁹

The case that Boccaccio introduces here is the famous anecdote of the two pigs that die after biting infected rags. Boccaccio distinguishes between his own eye-witness and that of other people in order to contrast that which is seen by oneself and that which is heard from others. Like the major classical historians, and unlike Villani, Boccaccio appears to uphold direct sensory experience of an event as the epistemological foundation of historiography. This phenomenological emphasis leaves its imprint on Boccaccio's manner of expression.

As has already been noted, the style of Boccaccio's writing is characterized by its use of alternatives or antithesis. In this quote, Boccaccio moves first between alternative sources of knowledge (seeing, hearing . . . myself, many others) and then to various reactions to these sources (believing (or not), recording). Boccaccio restlessly resists firm conclusions about objective, static causes of historical events. Throughout the narrative, Boccaccio turns his readers' attention toward how people perceived the events of the plague, and then how this perception, more overtly than any other factor, influenced their course of action. Perception and perspective, by definition, underscore a personal engagement with the present and the past, and a turning away from doctrinal pre-conceptions about historical reasons, conditions, and effects.

⁴⁹ Intro.16: "Maravigliosa cosa è a udire quello che io debbo dire: il che, se dagli occhi di molti e da' miei non fosse stato veduto, appena che io ardissi di crederlo, non che di scriverlo, quantunque da fededegna udito l'avessi." See *Inferno* xxv.46–48: "If you are now, reader, slow to believe what I shall say, that will not be amazing: for I who saw it hardly admit it to myself" [Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento/ ciò ch' io dirò, non sarà maraviglia,/chè io che'l vidi a pena il mi consento]. Alluding to this passage from the *Commedia*, Boccaccio underscores the nightmarish phenomenon of the plague, its almost incredible nature, and the necessity of individual, subjective confirmation of his record. But the differences in his narrative are of critical importance. Dante is describing the nether regions of hell, a place of which he is the sole human authority and for whose inhabitants normal temporal existence has ceased to matter, for they have already passed the threshold of death. Boccaccio is addressing, by contrast, how one understands earthly history. The plague affected everyone among his readership. Accepting his account requires a different, historical credulity, for the account, being wholly determined in and by time, lacks the spiritual dimension of Dante's poem.

In his first antithesis, between seeing first-hand and hearing second-hand, Boccaccio relates his own, individual experience to that of others. This relation implies something problematical for the understanding of history, revealing a scepticism toward any *auctoritates*. In a second antithesis that illuminates this scepticism, Boccaccio says that he scarcely would have passively accepted or believed, let alone actively written or recorded what is claimed as the historical record, without these personal observations. Boccaccio, in this single sentence, pokes fun at the scribes and readers of the traditional medieval historiography, perhaps including those trusting in the hagiography of the *Golden Legend* and of other preaching texts.⁵⁰

Yet implicit in Boccaccio's assertion is the irony, again characteristic of his book, that turns the assertion back against its author. For if the author himself would have found other people's descriptions of the plague hard to believe, why should his reader believe his story? Boccaccio says that he himself required the testimony of other eyewitnesses in order to trust in his own observations. What then should he expect from his audience? That this ironic self-consciousness is not unwitting on Boccaccio's part is suggested by the reiteration of the verb "hear" and "heard" [*udire . . . udito*] in the same sentence, associating the reader's hearing with his own. Boccaccio is aware that his account may be more no more credible than that of other writers or of any "trustworthy person." He therefore challenges his readers to discover reasons for accepting his narrative that lie outside the narrative itself. They should not simply rely on his authority, but rather complete the hermeneutic circle, verifying his historical explanations on the basis of their own experience. Boccaccio may be the first writer in the Western historiographical tradition to treat his text in such a self-consciously playful manner. He clearly enjoys the game, as the reader soon finds out that the *brigata* and their hundred stories are, the author confesses, recorded entirely second-hand, being heard from a "person worthy of trust."⁵¹ Boccaccio's narrative therefore highlights a basic quality of his work: the reader is confronted with the responsibility of determining the validity of what he is reading.⁵² This responsibility is predicated on the individual's

⁵⁰ A viewpoint reiterated by the fraudulent *vita* of Cepparello (I.1) and the tale of Frate Cipolla (VI.10).

⁵¹ Intro. 49: ". . . sì come io poi da persona degna da fede sentii. . ."

⁵² See the remark by Teodolinda Barolini on the "programmatic and deliberate

hermeneutical freedom, which in turn requires that he take on the anxiety and confusion created by an independent search for meaning of historical events.

If the encounter with the plague's deadly force bewilders both writers, Boccaccio, through his posing of antithetical alternatives, embraces a wider range of explanations than Villani for the reaction to this exceptional event. Consider the example of the impotence of the medical profession, which according to Villani provided neither "understanding nor a true cure" for the disease.⁵³ Boccaccio brings forward this same point, but uses the status of doctors as one point in the larger complex of disease, medicine, and the growing social panic. The periodic motion of his syntax enables him to build oppositions within oppositions:

For the cure of such a malady neither the advice of the doctor ["consiglio di medico"] nor the potency of the medicine ["virtù di medicina"] seemed to yield or bring forth any effect. On the contrary: since either the sickness's very nature resisted treatment, or because the ignorance of the medical practitioners ["la ignoranza de' medicanti"] kept them from knowing its motive force and, as a result, from applying the needed remedy, not only were few healed, but indeed almost all within three days were dead. And the number of practitioners increased enormously, beyond the number of the learned [*scienziati*], through the addition of both women and men who had never received any training in medicine ["dottrina di medicina"].⁵⁴

openness of the *Decameron*," in "Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375)," in *European Writers: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. William T.H. Jackson and George Stade, 14 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1983–1991), 2:527. This remark does not easily harmonize with Barolini's own attempts to determine the meaning of the sequence of story-telling as a progress of an "artificial" or "secular morality" (526).

⁵³ *Cronica* III.1–4, p. 13: "Di questa pestifera infermità i medici in catuna parte del mondo, per filosofia naturale, or per fisica, o per arte di strologia non ebbono argomento né vera cura."

⁵⁴ Intro.13: "A cura delle quale infermità né consiglio di medico, né virtù di medicina alcuna pareva valesse o facesse profitto: anzi, o che la natura del malore nol patisse, o che la ignoranza de' medicanti (de' quali, oltre al numero degli scienziati, così di femine come d'uomini, senza avere alcuna dottrina di medicina avuta giammai, era il numero diventato grandissimo) non conoscesse da che si movesse e, per consequente, debito argomento non vi predesse, non solamente pochi ne guarivano, anzi quasi tutti infra'l terzo giorno morivano." Erich Auerbach, while not mentioning the antithetical trait, remarks on Boccaccio's style: "His prose, which has often been analyzed, reflects the schooling it received from antique models and the precepts of medieval rhetoric, and it displays all its arts. It summarizes complex situations in a single period and puts a shifting word order at the service of emphasizing what is important, of retarding or accelerating the tempo of action, of rhythmic and melodic effect." *Mimesis*, 180.

In the first part of the sentence, the physicians' advice is limited by their ignorance, and the medicinal potency by the nature of the disease. As in Villani's narrative, human acumen has its measure and degree, but Boccaccio, once again, places these limits within an empirical, phenomenological sphere, leaving the doctrinal dimension aside. His antithesis between physician and medicine, and in turn between medicine and disease underscores the limits of human knowledge in the encounter with physical, worldly phenomena: the disease is, to the sufferers and to their caretakers, astonishing, extraordinary, unprecedented. There may indeed be a cure for it, only the doctors have not discovered it. Or indeed there may not be. Both possibilities are open, no firm conclusions are reached. What we can conclude is that Boccaccio does not take his point of departure from dogma. On the contrary he implies through his scepticism an ignorance about the very limits of human insight, and thus questions, in the most severe way, the conventional epistemological basis for determining these limits on the basis of received, external authority.

Boccaccio therefore distances his viewpoint from that of the clergy, especially the Dominicans, who expressed knowledge and certainty about God's role in human destiny. Boccaccio's readers could hear within these words an implicit criticism of the clerical doctors as well. For the clergy often designated themselves as *medici* who were responsible for the cure of the soul, prescribing the Church's sacraments as *medicina*.⁵⁵ Given Boccaccio's predilection for ambiguity and contrasts, could he not be commenting on the state of the clergy, who, as learned men [*scienziati*], still were ignorant in their advice and

⁵⁵ Among the many references: Passavanti, *Specchio*, 135: "... dove il prete, come medico, dee curare la piaga [di certi peccati occulti], non la faccia. . . ."; Giovanni da San Gimignano, *Sermones fimbres*, Lyons 1499, dist.3 serm.1.5b: "Nam quando medicus dicit aliqua esse facienda ad salutem alicuius infermi: statim festinant facere illi quibus dictum est. . . . Et ecce tota die auditus verba et sermones medici celestis christi de his que necessaria sunt ad salutem anime vestre. . . . Sive de medicina charitatis [or "de medicina equitatis, pietatis"] qui tunc nihil eorum facitis: et de servando sermone nihil curatis"; *Leggenda aurea*, 3:1004 (St. Bernard); Cavalca, *Specchio della croce*, Newberry MS 129, 100r, describing the sacraments as providing medicine: "... li santi sacramenti, in qua sono medexine contro el peccato, per conservare la sanita e per guarire o preservative o inpu gnative o purgative." In apposition to this choice of metaphor, there were Trecento physicians who also claimed, as philosophers, knowledge of the soul; Petrarch was attacking this claim in his *Invective contra medicum*, written about the same time as the *Decameron*. For a discussion of the *Invective*, see Carol Everhart Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 155–161.

prescriptions against the plague's spiritual menace? The Dominicans and Villani considered spiritual consolation to be found in one's knowledge of God's will, even in that knowledge which confessed the Transcendence of this will. But the plague, Boccaccio implies, unleashed a mystery that crushed all such cathedrals of doctrinal certainty. Petrarch in his letters states this more explicitly. If the plague uncovered the folly of those very people with the greatest pretensions to knowledge in Trecento Florence, this would be in keeping with the stories of the *Decameron*, which lampoon the mendicants as simpletons and hypocrites.⁵⁶

Boccaccio's question about the limits of human understanding is reiterated in the second part of the sentence, in the opposition between the learned, the *scienziati*, and the practitioners of other forms of medicine. As the learned fail to discover the cure, the unlearned, lay practitioners, both women and men, grow in number. What Boccaccio thought about their ability emerges from the syntactical parallel between their increasing numbers and the final mass mortality. With its striking psychological perspective, his narrative demonstrates how anxious men and women became in the face of the onslaught, and makes the anxiety comprehensible. Not only is Boccaccio's assessment of human psychology more differentiated than Villani's; he is also able to show how the states of mind of the city's inhabitants were mainsprings to their actions, something that Villani attempts only through a pre-conceived theological vocabulary. In this single brief passage one sees the growth of alternatives to the traditional guild of doctors, and one can imagine, in the face the doctors' failure, why it came about. Boccaccio's narrative will weave together a nexus of cause and effect in the history of the plague. This weaving, most difficult given the singular nature of the disease, is most likely one of the challenges, which, he tells his ladies, the Introduction poses.⁵⁷ And the plague provided the best opportunity for threshing traditional explanations of historical events on the floor of scepticism.

Boccaccio begins his account at the level of observed appearances and overt actions, which in turn provide a clue to the motives of the actors. He lights upon the inner incentives of people's response

⁵⁶ See in the first day I.1 and I.6, the stories told by Panfilo and Emilia.

⁵⁷ "Questo orrido cominciamento vi fia non altramenti ch' a' camminanti una montagna aspra ed erta. . . ." Intro.4. Boccaccio's reversal of the imagery of *Inferno* I and possibly *Fam.* IV.1 is apparent.

to the pestilence in a way that does not diminish but rather enlarges the reader's sense of their innate human qualities. Villani's charges of "inhumanity" or actions "very foreign to human nature, detested by the Christian faithful" (*Cronica* II.90–91) are absent from his record. Boccaccio apparently thought too much, or too little, of human nature to use this category in his narrative. Just as he considers human reason to be limited in discovering the whys and wherefores of the plague's advent and course, so does he suggest it to be equally benighted in identifying 'unnatural' responses to the disaster. His examination of the different reactions leads the reader to conclude that people are able to act in many different ways. What matters to Boccaccio first of all is to perceive their reasons for acting the way they do, and with what consequences.

With people witnessing these things [i.e. the spectacular death of the two pigs] and other similar or indeed greater occurrences, diverse fears and anxieties came to life (*nacquero*) in those who remained alive; and these fears and anxieties drew almost all to a very cruel measure: that of avoiding and fleeing the sick and their affairs; and everyone was caught up in the belief that by doing this he would gain his own safety (*salute*).⁵⁸

The double-structure of the syntax indicates again Boccaccio's scope of review, which provides rhythmic differentiations to the type of events. Boccaccio now directs the reader's attention to the impressions of his fellow citizens. The narrator stands at a distance, assuming a tone of greater objectivity. But this objective manner of speech still is concerned with an analysis of the emotions, which spring forth in their mastery over human behavior. The survivors' course of action has almost an organic quality, and it possesses unconscious power: "diverse fears and anxieties came to life," drawing those who remained alive to their own private end: to avoid and flee the sick and their affairs, thus overcoming their customary compassion. In the presence of incredible sights, which remain closed to human understanding, people responded not with knowledge, but with anxious instinct and

⁵⁸ Intro.19: "Dalle quale cose e dai assai altre a queste simiglianti o maggiori nacquero diverse paure e immaginazioni in quegli che rimanevano vivi, e tutti quasi ad un fine tiravano assai crudele, ciò era di schifare e di fuggire gl'infermi e le lor cose; e così facendo, si credeva ciascuno a se medesimo salute acquistare." My emphasis. This sentence casts a shadow over the *brigata's* later self-isolation. Bernardo, "The Plague as Key to Meaning," 48–49, uses this idea to support his thesis criticizing the ten exiles.

belief: “. . . everyone was caught up in the belief. . . .” Boccaccio provides an understanding of this impulsive, instinctive behavior, beginning with the epistemological failure of the learned, the *scienziati*, in the face of the unprecedented, awesome contagion. The living may succumb to emotional reactions that have ill-considered consequences. The moralizing chronicler will stand apart and judge them. But Boccaccio, as an historical writer, whose method is to consider different potential causes, makes their reaction explicable without applying doctrinal categories. In Boccaccio’s account, the absence of any persuasive empirical, rational explanation naturally leads the living to adopt responses they find appropriate. For Villani the fault of the Florentines was their willful ignorance of God’s judgment; Boccaccio makes it easy to see why they lacked knowledge, and why they therefore resorted to a wider, more diverse range of unconventional behavior based on differing attitudes towards the plague’s mortal virulence.

Characteristic of his manner of proposing alternatives of behavior, Boccaccio places the survivors into four categories, two plus two. In the first grouping are first those who live “in moderation” [*moderatamente*] like classical Epicureans in their gardens, closing themselves off from reports about the dead.⁵⁹ The second type, “drawn to a contrary opinion”—again he stresses their passivity—satisfy their appetites “without mean or measure . . . both day and night.” The third group chooses, he writes, a “middle way” between the first two, using things in sufficiency and carrying flowers and herbs before their noses as they walked the city streets. The final group flees the city.⁶⁰

The actions of the second group, especially their assumption of others’ property, exhibit a “bestial tendency.” By describing them as “bestial,” the narrator seems to indict them in the strongest terms to this point.⁶¹ But he is describing and showing as much as he is criticizing. Notably he avoids the term “inhuman,” preferred by Villani. “Bestial” as ‘animal’ suggests a world turned on its head,

⁵⁹ Intro.20; this group constitutes, as others have noted, the original reference to a “brigata.”

⁶⁰ Intro.21–22: “in contraria opinione tratti . . . senza modo o misura . . . il giorno e il notte. . . .”; Intro.24–25: “una mezzana via.”

⁶¹ Intro.22: “proponimento bestiale.” Cf. the considerations of Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 40.

the baser appetites supplanting human reason. The reader finds this reversal confirmed in the later account of people and animals in the countryside. The peasants die “without any doctor’s care or servant’s help . . . at all hours of the day and night, not as befits men but almost like beasts [“quasi come bestie”]. . . .” The farm animals, by contrast, “almost like rational creatures [“quasi come razionali”] returned homeward satisfied in the evening after eating well during the day, without any shepherd’s guidance.”⁶²

Boccaccio’s continual use of antitheses within single sentences and within the larger structure of the narrative shows his attempt to establish a rhythm of description for a world that teetered on chaos, verged on anarchy. It was a world caught up in a passion veering toward personal and civic disintegration. Yet the plague paradoxically liberates the author and his audience to confront more immediately the primal drives in human existence and to consider new choices of action following the collapse of the conventional moral hierarchies.⁶³

Boccaccio describes the plague in a way that alludes to his own experience of erotic suffering. For in his opening Proem he recounts his own susceptibility to the fires of passion, attributing his painful experience in love to a “poorly regulated appetite” [“poco regolato appetito”] (Proem.3). As in his portrayal of his fellow citizens, Boccaccio uses for his own condition a phrase that connotes a breakdown of the moral hierarchy of the soul. This conception of moral psychology—that the appetites need be regulated by reason—was frequently

⁶² Intro.43–45: “. . . senza alcuna fatica o aiuto di servidore . . . di dì e di notte indifferentemente, non come uomini ma quasi come bestie. . . .”; “quasi come razionali, poi che pasciuti erano bene il giorno, la notte alle lor case, senza alcuno correggimento di pastore si tornavano satolli.” Note the stylistic parallels in the two sentences: *quasi come . . . senza alcuno*.

⁶³ One may compare this view with the remark of Giuseppe Mazzotta on the plague-narrative: “In effect, the hypotactic arrangement of the sentences, the wealth of subordinates and the poised slow rhythm are symptoms of an intellectual effort to connect the dismembered appearances of the world into an intelligible pattern of order and hierarchy, which rhetoric manages to simulate, but which the plague literally effaces. The infection is perceived through a series of bewildering, unstable signs, which cannot be construed definitively as signs of disease: the text is punctuated by repeated alternatives, either/or phrases and careful distinctions which sunder the appearances from any determinable, moral or even physical origin.” *The World at Play in Boccaccio’s “Decameron,”* 20–21. I would agree more with the last clause of this statement than with a claim for an “intelligible pattern of order and hierarchy,” and see Boccaccio as striving to show the existential and psychological dimensions of this cataclysm.

expressed by the Trecento Dominicans in their theological and pastoral treatises, for example in the *Pantheologia* of Rainerio da Pisa.⁶⁴ In a way similar to *The Golden Legend's* description of the Roman pestilence, mendicant moralists often associated the passions of sensual love with the fires of pestilence, in the chaos each created whether in the individual soul or in the body politic.⁶⁵ Boccaccio draws upon this association of passion with pestilence by relating his weakness in love to the citizens' anxieties amid the plague. But we should note that he first puts his own historical experience and frailty for the reader's examination and sympathy in the Proem. Here as throughout the *Decameron* Boccaccio transforms the ecclesiastical terms of moral expression by making the reader aware of the subjective ground of utterance. It is this ground that the mendicants typically conceal, as they assume for themselves the superiority of the *ratio*. Boccaccio's experience of the power of emotions, by contrast, validates his compassion for the reactions of those suffering under the plague.

⁶⁴ See Rainerio's discussion of *libido* as "inordinata concupiscentia," as an "appetitus animi quo eternis temporalia proponuntur." For, Rainerio states, "ex libidine mens vel ratio homini diminuitur vel hebetetur. . . . Hec autem concupiscentia est homini naturalis in quantum subditur rationi: in quantum autem excedit limites rationis intantum est contra naturam hominis. unde per peccatum concupiscentie vel libidinis ratio hebetatur." *Pantheologia sive summa universae theologiae*. 2 vols. (Venice: Hermann Lichtenstein, 1486), 2:56r–v, 58r. Rainerio's work has gained little scholarly attention. Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 3:292–293, places Rainerio's death in 1348 and cites over 30 manuscripts of the *Pantheologia*, as well as many incunabula, but no commentary. See also Quéatif-Échard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 1:635a–636b.

⁶⁵ See Giovanni da San Gimignano, *Sermones funebres*, dist.3 serm.8, in which *pestilentia* symbolizes the sins of the flesh: "Tertia negatio [peccati] scilicet in cathedra pestilentie non sedere: excludit peccatum voluptatis et lascivie. quod carni attribuitur. Et signaliter per cathedram pestilentie intelligitur. quia enim caro locus est ipsius anime: in quo quidem resident quando in ea delectatur." For a discussion of the relation between the flames of pestilence and desire in Boccaccio's work, see Jessica Levenstein, "Out of Bounds: Passion and Plague in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *Italica* 73 no. 3 (1996): 313–335. In his later work, *On the Fall of Illustrious Men* [*De casibus illustrium virorum*], Boccaccio repeatedly rails against the dangers of erotic attractions, decrying at one point the "unspeakable plague of susceptible minds" ["mentium lubricarum pestis infanda"], susceptible to "seductive love": Bk. 4: "In pulcritudinem et amorem illecebrem" (Gainsville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962), 117–118. I thank Tobias Foster Gittes for referring me to this work. See also Petrarch's *On Religious Leisure* [*De otio religioso*], II.2, where he cites Cicero on the Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum: "He said that no more deadly plague has been given to mortals by nature than the pleasure of the body," *On Religious Leisure*, 101; *De otio religioso*, 71, lines 27–28: ". . . nullam capitaliorem pestem quam voluptatem corporis hominibus dicebat a natura datam. . . ."

The majority of surviving citizens, the narrator reports, swept along by their anxieties and apprehensions of the unfathomable sickness, resort to their four different ways of abandoning the sick. He notes that those leaving the city proper were prompted by certain beliefs regarding God's judgment. This last grouping "were of the cruelest feeling," he writes, but their escape was founded on the opinion that "God's wrath" only fell on those inside the city walls, or "as if they imagined that no person must remain in the city and that its last hour had come."⁶⁶ Here Boccaccio records how people mistakenly believed that divine punishment would be confined to the microcosm of the city. The major difference from Villani's account is not that this belief existed, but rather in the narrator's perspective toward its power in the historical drama. Boccaccio's story attempts to underscore what motivated the citizens to behave the way they did. Villani states in a corresponding passage that "... in diverse regions the divine Judgment (against which no one can bar the gates) struck down those who fled, as it did the others who were not so well provided."⁶⁷ Villani adopts a position that presents a knowledge of just what these events signify—God's judgment—as it were from the standpoint of the heavens toward the earth.

Boccaccio's narrative, by contrast, looks skyward from the ground. It shows the psychological motives of the Florentines, even in their folly, and develops their stature as historical actors who are more intimately responsible for the situation in which they live. Boccaccio's inquiry into the concrete basis of historical events is always screened by human mediation. The reader's view is colored by the emotions of the actors, and of the narrator himself, whose own confessed weakness prevents him from employing Transcendental verities on the one hand, and impassively judging the subjects' behavior on the other. "It is very human to have compassion towards those in distress,"⁶⁸ and the distressed are not only the injured, but also those who, through fearful misjudgment or venality, commit injury. That these last lack compassion makes them defective; but how much compassion does the moralizing inquisitor have, who fails to appreciate what

⁶⁶ Intro.25: "... erano di più crudel sentimento. . ."; "quasi avvisando niuna persona in quella [città] dover rimanere e la sua ultima ora era venuta." My emphasis.

⁶⁷ *Cronica* II.97–99: "... in diverse contrade il divino giudicio (a ccui non si può serrare le porte) li abatté come li altri ch no s'erano proveduti."

⁶⁸ Proem.2: "Umana cosa è aver compassione dagli afflitti. . ."

propels their behavior? The transgressors are actors who are also acted upon by unfounded but explicable opinions, and by primal impulses.

From the four groups jettisoning their social compassion, the last being the most extreme, there follows a crescendo of consequences that leads ultimately to a transformation in social behavior. The narrator unravels these consequences antithetically, and comprehends a nexus of cause and effect on the level of the “very human.” To the many sick, both men and women, the charity of friends is in short supply, and the greed of the servants increases. But at this point, in a most significant sentence, the narrator addresses a decisive change in relations between the sexes. In a “custom almost unheard of,” infirm women, lacking sufficient numbers of maidservants, exposed their bodies to male nurses, no matter how “charming, beautiful or well-bred” a woman was, no matter how “young or not” the man might have been.⁶⁹

Boccaccio’s antithetical style of discourse, coupled with his intense poetic preoccupation with women, leads him to explore the historical relation between the sexes in a way absent from Villani’s chronicle. This physical openness between men and women, the decline of shame, introduces both Pampinea’s fear in the city for the women’s sexual modesty [*onestà*] as well as the boldness of the stories told outside it. This exposure also supports Boccaccio’s claim, in his Preface, that he has insight into women’s secret chambers and hearts, which are normally concealed from the extroverted diversions of male society.⁷⁰ In terms of the plague-narrative, the sentence crystallizes a sense of historical sequence missing in the *Cronica*. The upper-class woman who revealed her body to men did so “only because the necessity [*necessità*] of her weakness demanded she do so.” The cause of her behavior is designated, and it was not the summons of a libidinous nature. The effect of this openness, however, produces a second result, this time on the level of social conventions: “. . . so that, for those women who recovered their strength, it was perhaps the cause [*cagione*] why they had less shame [*onestà*] in the days that followed.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Intro.29: “uso quasi davanti mai non udito”; “leggiadra bella o gentil”; “gio-vane o altro.”

⁷⁰ Proem.10–12.

⁷¹ Intro.29: “solo che la necessità della sua infermità il richiedesse. . . .”; “. . . il

Boccaccio's account of the plague thus explains a complex succession of events. He uses the terms *necessità* and *cagione* precisely and cautiously, with his characteristic adverbial qualification ("only," "perhaps"). The issue of freedom therefore enters the historical sequence, both among the historical actors—what people may choose to do—and in terms of the historian's degree of certainty, which must respect their ability to choose.

The picture Boccaccio presents is, at one and the same time, both more comprehensible and open-ended. In accordance with the circular hermeneutic in which Boccaccio operates, in his appeal to the reader's own authorization of his account, he justifies a sceptical attitude toward any description of this disaster by the very events that he records, that he himself claims to have witnessed. There is concord between what he has observed and his method of writing about it: awestruck wonder characterizes both what he sees and what he writes down. The mass mortality that continued "both day and night" "was astonishing to hear about, not to mention witness with one's own eyes."⁷² Boccaccio appears shaken by the plague's fury firsthand, and takes his reader on his search for answers. His task is to make the incredible, the stupefying more approachable to human understanding through written exposition. And the social consequences of the plague are as astonishing as its progress. The historian must articulate his conception of cause and effect within the features of a city society falling into a chaos that is also liberating: "As a result [of the mortality] among those who remained alive there came about, almost by necessity ["quasi di necessità"], customs directly contrary to the original traditions of the citizenry."⁷³

If, for Villani, one must grasp the Transcendental scheme and purpose behind the events, Boccaccio rejects this *amaestramento* as the single principle that clarifies the social—and epistemological—anarchy called forth by the plague. When he records how the long-held customs were transformed into their contraries, he focuses not on underscoring people's ignorance as one among their other doctrinal

che, in quelle ne guarirono, fu forse di minore onestà, nel tempo che succedette, cagione."

⁷² Intro.30: ". . . per la forza della pistolenza, era tanta nella città la moltitudine di quegli di di e di notte morieno, che uno stupore era a udir dire, non che a riguardarlo."

⁷³ Intro.31: "Per che [the mortality], quasi di necessità, cose assai contrarie a' primi costumi de' cittadini nacquero tra coloro li quali rimanean vivi."

shortcomings, but rather on explicating the confused emotional motives and demographic disturbances that produced this transformation. The “almost by necessity” in his account implies that people, and their instinct for survival, were in large measure responsible, as far as one may observe, for the development.

The narrator’s human eye, devoted to uncovering the interlacing of the phenomena it perceives, sees all civic traditions as temporal and subject to change. These customs, traditions, and their representatives also include the Church. In accordance with Boccaccio’s major shift in philosophical perspective toward the concrete and finite, the clergy are no less human than the laity, being subject in equal measure to the plague’s fury and its effects. The antithetical rhythm of narrative inquiry addresses both groups, and the authority of their respective traditions:

And in such affliction and distress in our city the revered authority of the laws, divine as well as human, was almost completely fallen and dissolved; for their ministers and executors, just like other men, were all either dead or sick or bereft of servants, so that they could not enforce the laws in the slightest. As a result everyone was allowed to behave as he pleased.⁷⁴

Florentine legal authority, both divine and human, canon and civil, has executors who are equally subject to death, so that the laws themselves have fallen into disrepute. And in the absence of legal restraint, both moral and political, permissiveness is the order of the day. The clergy, in a rapid, visible way, has proved itself mortal, powerless to preserve social order and civility in the face of pestilence. This sentence, placed as it is in the middle of the four alternatives of negligent social behavior, possesses a central position in the narrative as symptom and catalyst, as effect and cause of the city’s shipwreck. Could not clerical intervention have mitigated the disaster?

⁷⁴ Intro.23: “E in tanta afflizione e miseria della nostra città era la reverenda autorità delle leggi, così divine come umane, quasi caduta e dissoluta tutta per li ministri ed esecutori di quelle, li quali, sí come gli altri uomini, erano tutti o morti o infermi o sí di famigli rimasi stremi, che ufficio alcuno non potean fare: per la qual cosa era a ciascuno licito quanto a grado gli era d’adoperare.” See Falsini’s documentation of the scarcity of officials: “Firenze dopo il 1348,” 438–442, especially 439: “propter epidemiam perteritam non reperiunter pedites stipendarii pro stipendiis et gagiis consuetis, propter quod non reperiuntur cives florentini volentes acceptare castellanarias castrorum arcium et terras comitatus et districtus Florentie ad quas extracti sunt secundum ordinamenta dicti Communis” (provision issued January 1349).

This question must have caused Villani some discomfort, for he only explicitly refers to the clergy in his fifth brief chapter, discussing Clement VI's indulgence to the repentant who die of the disease.⁷⁵ Here Villani's effort seems to be to restore people to the Church's sequence of sacraments, administered through its ordained representatives. And yet he records how people became worse in their ways of life. Not only does Villani decline to investigate the social causes for this decline in morals, he also decides not to ask more specifically the reasons for the Church's lack of influence.

In contrast to Villani, Boccaccio associates the clergy with doctors who failed to cure the sick. Now, thinking antithetically, he considers the two alternative forms of law, ecclesiastical and civil. In addressing why the laws possessed little persuasive force, Boccaccio stresses how the plague overwhelmed all customary resources. This sentence, at his narrative's outset, establishes a parallel between the civil authorities and the religious, in a way that helps explain the citizens' anxiety and diverse reactions to the epidemic:

And against this pestilence there availed neither intelligence nor human provision, which by order of the responsible officials cleaned the city of large amounts of waste, barred the entrance to any one who was sick, and issued many edicts for the preservation of health; nor yet of help were humble prayers offered to God not once but many times by devout persons, both in ordered processions and in other ways. But in about the early spring of the aforesaid year the pestilence began to show forth its grievous effects, horribly and in a miraculous manner.⁷⁶

Neither the civil magistrates nor the clergy, whether by rational or ritual means, organized or independent, by science or prayer, could provide a bulwark against the plague. Its "miraculous manner" overcame their wisdom and supplications.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Cronica* V.1–4; p. 15: "In questi tempi della mortale pestilenza, Papa Clemente Sesto fece grande indulgenza generale della pena di tutti i peccati a coloro che pentuti, e confessi la domandavano a' loro Confessori, e morivano. . . ."

⁷⁶ Intro.9: "E in quella [pestilenza] non valendo alcuno senno né umano provvedimento, per lo quale fu da molte immondizia purgata la città da oficiali sopra ciò ordinati e vietato l'entrarvi dentro a ciascuno infermo e molti consigli dati a conservazioni della sanità, nè ancora umili supplicazioni non una volta ma molte e in processioni ordinate, in altre guise a Dio fatte dalle divote persone, quasi nel principio della primavera dell'anno predetto orribilmente cominciò i suoi dolorosi effetti, e in miracolosa maniera, a dimostrare."

⁷⁷ Boccaccio's statement also stands in contrast to the *brigata's* assessment of the clerical estate, for example in Pampinea's criticism (Intro.62); as noted earlier, her argument to the female *brigata* may be considered a second plague-narrative,

With the understanding of Boccaccio's reluctance to reach facile conclusions when alternatives remain present, the reader can more fully comprehend his deliberation as to what brought on the plague. He formulates his answer in an antithesis that corresponds to the distinctions between laity and clergy, between scientific ratiocination and ecclesiastical provision, between human and divine authority: "either through the workings of heavenly bodies, or on account of our vile deeds."⁷⁸ The reader looks skyward, and sees either planetary conjunctions or divine wrath, listens either to astrological prediction or to theological homily. And yet, the narrator remarks, neither lay nor religious science can preserve the inhabitants from death.

This balance of possibilities is carried through by Boccaccio until the end of the plague-story when, in the outset of his lament over the empty city, a type of civic *Ubi sunt?* that begins a crescendo to the *brigata's* appearance, he stands awestruck over death's course:

What more is there to say . . . unless that so great and complete was the cruelty of Heaven, and perhaps in part the cruelty of people, that . . . between the sickness brought on by the power of the pestilence and the many sick poorly cared for and abandoned in their time of need because those in good health were seized with fear, it is believed with certainty that more than one hundred thousand human beings lost their lives within the city walls . . .⁷⁹

In addition to the first potential causes of death, Boccaccio offers now a more voluntary source, which has become the focus of his history: the civic abandonment, unleashed by mortal terror, that soon threatens the *onestà* of the ladies who gather in Santa Maria Novella and moves them to leave the city themselves. The Transcendent "cruelty of Heaven," be it planetary or divine, remains for this nar-

presenting an alternate perspective to the one offered by Boccaccio in his own name. And his statement finds no complement in Stefani's later summary that emphasizes the greed of the clergy. See Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca Fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 30, no. 1 (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1903–1955), 231: "Li preti e i frati andavano ai ricchi e in tanta moltitudine, ed erano sì pagati di tanto prezzo che tutti arricchiono."

⁷⁸ Intro.8: "per operazione de' corpi superiori o per le nostre inique opere."

⁷⁹ Intro.47: "Chi più si può dire, lasciando stare il contado e alla città ritornando, se non che tanta e tal fu la crudeltà del cielo, e forse in parte quella degli uomini, che . . . tra per la forza della pestilenza infermità e per l'esser molti infermi mal serviti o abbandonati ne' lor bisogni per la paura ch'aveono i sani, oltre a cento milia creature umane si crede per certo dentro alle mura della città . . . essere stati di vita tolti. . . .?"

rator outside further comment. He treats it largely with reverent silence, more intent on portraying, when it comes to matters of life and death, the various displays of people's anxious reactions. As the prime 'formal' cause of these events is beyond reckoning, so too perhaps the extent of human folly and ignorance—but only then perhaps, since all, both the observers and readers, are for the moment deprived of such ultimate insights.

These limitations on the historian's ability to define historical causes must be borne in mind when seeking to determine the sources of Boccaccio's description of the plague. For over two hundred years literary research has speculated on the relation between Boccaccio's account and the plague-histories of Thucydides, Lucretius, Macrobius, Livy, Ovid, Seneca, and Paul the Deacon, among others. The last comprehensive treatment of these relations was completed by Giovanni Getto. Getto reviews the previous essays on this subject and concludes that Boccaccio most likely knew an array of classical sources that borrowed and elaborated on the plague-*topos* amongst one another. Boccaccio's free, creative use of his sources, Getto writes, is very much in keeping with the interplay among the classical sources themselves.⁸⁰

While Getto is undoubtedly right to emphasize Boccaccio's free reconstruction of classical narratives, his overall supposition for positing Boccaccio's method of 'imitation' remains grounded, following Foscolo, upon demands of literary composition: above all Boccaccio was concerned with contrasting the darkness of plague with the lightness of the *brigata's* storytelling.⁸¹ It is legitimate to question just how carefree the ten exiles may be.⁸² But of more general concern for

⁸⁰ "La peste del *Decameron* e il problema della fonte Lucreziana," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 135 (1958): 518, 520. Vittore Branca, in his "Un modello medievale per l'Introduzione," claims that Boccaccio pursued a model for his narrative in order to "arricchire la nobiltà della sua tragica *ouverture*" and "impreziosire culturalmente i ritmi fatastici del suo grandioso trionfo della Morte. . ." *Boccaccio medievale*, 382. Branca finds this model in Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards* II.iv. But, as with Getto's evidence, the stylistic differences are too great for there to have been an 'imitation' in an authentic sense. Paul the Deacon's account is much shorter and has an elegaic tone throughout, largely without the antithetical turns of phrase that characterize Boccaccio's story. And Paul's narrative describes a rural, manorial scene, whereas Boccaccio's attention is focused on the cityscape of Florence.

⁸¹ Getto, "La peste del *Decameron*," 508, 522.

⁸² Cf. Bernardo, "The Plague as Key to Meaning," 48–49.

this study is whether Boccaccio's historical method is guided primarily by literary concerns.

Getto introduces Ovid's *Metamorphoses* VI and Seneca's *Oedipus* as 'translators' for Boccaccio of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* VI, which, in turn, was a revision of Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War* II, 47–54. These connections are plausible, but the cited passages fail to highlight the features of Boccaccio's narrative that have emerged in our comparison with Villani's chronicle. To be sure, certain elements found in the classical descriptions can also be attributed to Boccaccio's account, such as the emphasis the sources place on empirical observation and the non-rational, emotional motives of behavior. But neither Ovid nor Seneca nor Lucretius focuses upon the social disintegration that forms a central theme of the Florentine's writing. Ovid discusses the shamelessness of the sick (lines 567–8), but not of the survivors, and for the most part grief keeps families loyal and compassionate toward their kindred.

Boccaccio devotes most of his attention toward the survivors, and toward the effect that the fear of death had on their beliefs and their customs, which caused confusion and impulsive, instinctual behavior. Ovid's account indeed mentions the sense of anxious bewilderment (lines 525–7), but in no other Latin source does it receive such weight, such consistent momentum as in the *Decameron*. Boccaccio remarks on the incredible sights he himself witnessed; he records the futile efforts of both clerical and political classes; he stresses the different reactions of the citizens to the growing anarchy.

These observations are elaborated and refined in what must be considered Boccaccio's own authentic re-creation of historical method. None of the literary sources displays this method, a method that embraces, as only one aspect of its importance, the contrast between the Introduction and the stories for which Boccaccio explicitly apologizes:

And just as sadness is found at the extremes of happiness, so miseries are rounded by superseding joy.⁸³

⁸³ Intro.5: "E sí come la estremità della allegrezza il dolore occupa, cosí le miserie da sopravvenente letizia sono terminate." This is Boccaccio's antithetical expansion of St. Gregory's moral dictum "Praenuntia tribulationis est laetitia satietatis" (quoted by Villani II.77, cited by Green, *Chronicle into History*, 57).

This statement is more than a literary pronouncement. It is a psychological, indeed existential assertion that is formulated in the style most favored by the Florentine: that of antithesis, in which oppositions and contrasting perspectives are held in fluid equilibrium. This style of exposition, moreover, does not characterize either the Latin sources mentioned, nor the writings of his contemporary *prosatori*. Yet it is this style that expresses Boccaccio's scepticism toward moral preconceptions and toward a univocal sense of an ordained cosmos, both prominent features of Villani's narrative.

In one sense the early scholars of the *Decameron's* plague-story were correct: the classical account that most closely resembles that of Boccaccio is Thucydides's history of the plague in Athens in 430 B.C.⁸⁴ It is true that the Athenian devotes more attention to the nature of physical suffering, while Boccaccio attends more to social pathology, but significant similarities must be noted. Thucydides's statement that "[n]o fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. . . ." (II 53.4) is not echoed by the Latin authors; yet it resonates in the *Decameron* sentence: "thus the revered authority of the laws, both divine and human, appeared utterly fallen and dissolved."⁸⁵

Boccaccio amplifies the social dissolution that is outlined by Thucydides, but largely absent in the Latin writers. And he records his description in a style similar to the hallmarks of Thucydidean prose: antithetical division of syntax and even episodes in the *History*.⁸⁶ Boccaccio's portrayal reveals a definite stylistic kinship largely missing from the Latin authors he may have known, with the possible exception of Sallust.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See Ginguené, *Histoire littéraire d'Italie*, 3:82–91. For an overview of the scholarship, see Joseph E. Germano, "La fonte letteraria della pesta decameroniana."

⁸⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* II.53, transl. by Rex Warner (London: Penguin, 1954), 155. *Decameron*, Intro.23. In Lucretius there is no reference to the decline in civil authority; *De rerum natura* VI, 1276–7: "nec iam religio divum nec numina magni/ pendebantur enim: praesens dolor exsuperabat." In W.H.D. Rouse's translation: "And now neither the worship of the gods nor their power was much regarded: the present grief was too great." *De rerum natura* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1924), 534–535.

⁸⁶ Note e.g. the abrupt transition between the Funeral Oration of Pericles and plague-narrative. See W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 249; and Günther Wille, "Zu Stil und Methode des Thukydidēs" in *Thukydidēs*, ed. Hans Herter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 683–716.

⁸⁷ See the excerpts from Sallust's writings in the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi* of Bartolomeo da San Concordio. As for Sallust's reading of Thucydides, see Thomas Francis Scanlon, *The Influence of Thucydides on Sallust* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), 74–84; 120–121, 179–180.

The art of considering alternating perspectives and holding them both simultaneously in view spurs Boccaccio to address the extent of his limited knowledge of the connection of causes and effects, and his ignorance of ultimate and even secondary causes. Avoiding preconceived arrangements of cause and effect, this inquiry examines the diverse human efforts and failures in understanding destiny, much like the method of Thucydides. As did Thucydides, Boccaccio claims to have been present during the course of the pestilence, and the weight of empirical detail he recounts and his own experience of the suffering hinders him from leaping to the more abstract assumptions of his fellow Florentine, Villani.

But in discussing Boccaccio's relation to Thucydides, we encounter a problem that confounds the typical manner of discussing intellectual influence. For there appears to be no direct evidence that Boccaccio had read the Athenian.⁸⁸ Boccaccio's plague-narrative therefore appears to possess its greatest affinity with a historical work unknown to Boccaccio. But how surprising or unusual is this in the Renaissance?

Among Boccaccio's contemporaries, Petrarch was brought to admit unexpected similarities of style between his writings and those of the classical sources. It is worth noting that he was especially concerned about originality of style, as reflected in an early letter to Tommaso da Messina:

But I say it is of greater elegance and skill for us, as imitators of the bees, to put forward in our words ever so many views held by other men. Conversely we do not possess the style of this or that writer, but our very own, composed out of many. . . .⁸⁹

The particular alchemy of the ancients' writings with the author's personality was apt to inspire something new, even if, according to Petrarch, the thoughts expressed are not. Petrarch, who enjoyed para-

⁸⁸ Cf. for example Eric Cochrane's *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3, in which he states that Brunetti was one of the first to read Thucydides in over a thousand years. For a more specific study, see Alexander Kleinlogel, *Geschichte des Thukydidestextes im Mittelalter* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965).

⁸⁹ *Fam.* I.8.4–5: "Sed illud affirmo: elegantioris esse solentie, ut, apium imitatores, nostris verbis quamvis aliorum hominum sententias proferamus. Rursus nec huius stilum aut illius, sed unum nostrum conflatum ex pluribus habeamus. . . ." For studies on imitation and influence, see G.W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1980): 1–32; Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy*; and Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).

dox, acknowledges his originality even when citing from others. In the case of Boccaccio, it may be that he freely combines his readings of several classical authors when recording his account of the plague. But what of those authors he did not read, such as Thucydides, whose own manner of historical writing is closest to his own?

Petrarch, in his restless self-consciousness, deliberated on this form of resemblance as well, in fact in two letters to Boccaccio. Disturbed by the rumor that he has borrowed from the master Dante, he claims not to have studied his poetry, and adds:

This is one thing I do wish to make clear: if any of my vernacular writings resembles, or is the same as, anything of his or anyone else's, it comes not from theft or an attempt at imitation, which I have always avoided like reefs, especially in vernacular works, but from pure chance or similarity of character [*similitudo ingeniorum*], as Cicero calls it, which caused me unwittingly to follow in another's footsteps.⁹⁰

This "similarity of character," which Petrarch characteristically, and ironically, cites from a classical authority, is what, in his view, explains those turns of phrase he shares with Dante. Petrarch indicates his existential independence of thought and expression through his allusion to the sea-metaphor and sea-journey, a topic we shall traverse later on.⁹¹ The topic agitated him to the point that he returned to it in the second letter to Boccaccio, now written in a more general vein, with regard to both Latin and vernacular authors. Apparently unnoticed in Petrarchan commentary, it is a defense that provides us with a clue for grasping the historical import of Boccaccio's renewal of historical method:

⁹⁰ XXI.15.12: "Hoc unum non dissimulo, quoniam siquid in eo sermone a me dictum illius aut alterius cuiusquam dicto simile, sive idem forte cum aliquo sit inventum, non id furtim aut imitandi proposito, de quo semper in his maxime vulgaribus ut scopulos declinavi, sed vel casu fortuito factum esse, vel similitudine ingeniorum, ut Tullio videtur, iisdem vestigiis ab ignorante concursum." An earlier reference can be found in Petrarch's *Rerum memorandarum libri*, III.66.5, citing Cicero's *De or.* II.36.152 ("similitudine ingenii in eadem vestigia incurrisset"). This passage is overlooked in the scholarship cited above.

⁹¹ The metaphor for Petrarch characteristically indicates both the instability of the self, the perceiver, and also that which is perceived: see *Canz.* 257, 366 lines 67–71, and *Fam.* XVIII.3.1, written to Boccaccio. For an examination of the existential implications of the sea-metaphor see G. Heath King, *Existence Thought Style: Perspectives of a Primary Relation, portrayed through the work of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Timothy Kircher (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette UP, 1996), 134–138, who here for examples cites E.R. Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 128ff.

... I have abstained from plundering both the patrimony and the genius of others. If anything contrary to this is discovered, it derives from similarity of character [*similitudo . . . ingeniorum*] in the case of authors whom I have not read (as I wrote you in my previous letter) or, in the case of others, from the type of error or forgetfulness that we are now discussing.⁹²

Certainly the traditional method of tracing intellectual influence encounters difficulty if the thread of readership between one writer and another is lost or absent. Nonetheless Petrarch points to this problematical form of affinity: that of a kinship of mind and character, shown primarily in style, between two writers unknown to each other. With regard to Boccaccio's method of historical inquiry, might not such a kinship have existed between Thucydides and him?

In approaching an answer, the investigation encounters a second, more fundamental question: on what basis would one look to explain the presence of this affinity? These stylistic affinities between Boccaccio and Thucydides indicate the "similarity of character" identified by Petrarch. Upon what is this "similarity of character" grounded? Petrarch provides no answer, but he tells us that historical affinities among thinkers and writers may be uncovered not simply by determining 'who read whom,' which, as he realized, is insufficient.

The question raised by Petrarch's statements on "similarity of character" has been addressed in a definitive way by a recent philosophical study, which has demonstrated the existential basis for this affinity. G. Heath King's *Existence Thought Style: Perspectives of a Primary Relation* has shown that kinships among thinkers are founded upon the extent to which they engage the basic problems inherent in human existence—problems of life, death, and destiny—in similar ways.⁹³ The kinship is made manifest not only through the similar content of their writings, but more importantly through shared attributes of style. The Renaissance poet and the Greek historian, both

⁹² *Fam.* XXII.2.15: "... me nec ullius prede avidum et ut patrimonii si ingenii alieni spoliis abstinere. Siquid aliter inventum erit ac dico, vel in his quos non legi, similitudo facit ingeniorum, de quo epystola ad te superiore disserui, vel in aliis error aut oblivio, de quo nunc agitur." See also *De otio religioso* 89.27: "partitate quadam ingeniorum" between Cicero and Philo (*On Religious Leisure*, 125).

⁹³ The study examines the integral relation between style and thought in a work, and how this relation indicates the degree of a thinker's confrontation with or avoidance of the problematical nature of existence. King's book contains untapped resources for reviewing and reconfiguring critical developments in the history of ideas.

professing to have experienced the plague and its horrors first-hand, shared, we may observe, a common sensibility about the fragility of life and the treacherous power of human fears upon the imagination. This shared sensibility is evident in their use of an antithetical style, which is suited to the way they examined not only the limits of human knowledge, but also the nature of moral freedom, of how inevitable or voluntary is the course of human events.

We discover, by perceiving Boccaccio's break both from the method of the chroniclers and also from the style of the Latin sources discussed, that he assimilates classical modes of thinking on a primal level: by responding to existential issues of life, destiny, and death, and of securing the confidence to examine one's knowledge about them.

That Trecento humanists not only understood the Latin classics intellectually, as 'book-learning,' but rather integrated them as part of their inner character, can be seen in Petrarch's remark, in that last-cited letter to Boccaccio, concerning his readings of Virgil, Horace, Boethius, and Cicero: "They have entered me with such familiarity not only in my memory but in my very marrow and they have become one with my way of thinking [*ingenio*] . . . [they have] taken root in the deepest part of my mind. . . ." ⁹⁴ Petrarch's appropriation of these writings, in his eyes, served to develop his originality, not to diminish it. For any determination of influence of these writers upon Petrarch's work must be weighed in context of his free choice to read them: as he states elsewhere in the *Familiars*, ". . . the authority of those practicing philosophy does not restrict the freedom of one's judgment." ⁹⁵ Similar to Boccaccio's attentive selection of sources, ⁹⁶ Petrarch claims to choose readings in accord with his intellectual and emotional predispositions.

Regarding the humanists' free-standing appropriation of past thinkers, a final question may be raised: how characteristic is Boccaccio's

⁹⁴ *Fam.* XXII.2.13: "Hac se michi tam familiariter ingessere et non modo memorie sed medullis affixa sunt unumque cum ingenio facta sunt meo . . . ipsa quidem hereant, actis in intima animi parte radicibus. . . ."

⁹⁵ *Fam.* III.6.3: ". . . philosophantium autoritas non impedi iudicii libertatem"; s.a. I.3.3, and his criticism of Cicero, *Fam.* XXIV.3 and 4; also Walter Rugg, "Cicero und der Humanismus. Petrarca" in *Das neue Cicerobild*, ed. Karl Büchner (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 65–128.

⁹⁶ Aside from Getto's remarks cf. also the essay by Cormac ó Cuilleain, "Boccaccio's Decameron: The Plot Thickens" in *Italian Storytellers. Essays on Italian Narrative Literature*, ed. E. Haywood and C. ó Cuilleain (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 79–110.

writing for the mid-Trecento *prosatori* and humanists? That he represents, in his historical method, a decisive alternative to Villani's chronicle has been shown. But does this method and style of exposition shed light on a broader movement of ideas and perceptions of the time, or does the narrative, in its originality, present a solitary achievement? Might not this account be placed in relation not only to the chroniclers, but also to other contemporary forms of historical writing that share a common impulse and indeed style?

In examining the *Decameron's* narrative of the Black Death in relation to works of other authors, scholars have often overlooked the composition of Petrarch's letters to his friends, the *Familiars*. Petrarch himself, from the vantage point of his later years, praised Boccaccio's account for "fittingly" and "splendidly" presenting the state of affairs in Florence during the plague.⁹⁷ Yet several of Petrarch's *Familiar* letters were also written as responses to the 1348 pestilence. In the very first letter Petrarch writes to his Flemish friend "Socrates," Louis Heyligen of Beeringen:

What are we to do now, my brother? . . . Time, as they say, has flowed out between our fingers. Our old hopes have gone to the grave with our friends. 1348 is the year that has left us isolated and destitute. . . . Irreplacable are the final losses; and whatever death inflicted is yet a wound beyond a doctor's cure.⁹⁸

This troubling theme of temporality and mortality extends from the first letter across the twenty-four books into, as one might expect, his letters of old age, the *Seniles*.⁹⁹ At the outset of these compila-

⁹⁷ See *Sen.* XVII.3: ". . . patrie nostre statum, illius scilicet pestilentissimi temporis, quod pre omnibus nostra etas lugubre ac miserum mundo vidit, meo quidem iudicio, et narrasti proprie et magnifice exaltasti." The letter is found in Luca Carlo Rossi's edition of *Dec.* X.10 and Petrarch's translation of it: *Griselda* (Palermo: Salerio, 1991), 74–76.

⁹⁸ I.1.1–2: "Quid vero nunc agimus, frater? . . . Tempora, ut aiunt, inter digitos effluerunt; spes nostre veteres cum amicis sepulte sunt. Millesimus trecentisimus quadragesimus octavus annus est, qui nos solos atque inopes fecit. . . . irreparabiles sunt ultime iacture; et quodcunque mores intulit, immedicabile vulnus est." One manuscript dates this letter "Idibus Ianuariis 1350": *Le familiari*, ed. Vittore Rossi, vol. 1 (Florence: Sansoni 1933), 14n.

⁹⁹ The *Seniles* begin as well with a lament over deaths caused by the plague: the outbreak in 1361 killed his friend Socrates in Avignon. Petrarch makes the association between the openings of the *Seniles* and the *Familiars* explicit in *Sen.* I.1. *Le Senili*, vol. 1, ed. Elvira Nota and Ugo Dotti (Rome: Guido Izzi 1993), 2. For an overview of Petrarch's comments on the plague throughout his life, see Renee Neu Watkins, "Petrarch and the Black Death: From Fear to Monuments," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 196–223.

tions, Petrarch stresses to Socrates that death's shadow was present in his life's story even before his birth:

In exile I was conceived, in exile I was born, with such labor and with such risk by my mother that not only the mid-wives but also the doctors for a long time judged her to have expired. Thus I first experienced danger before I was born, and I came to the very threshold of life under the omen of death.¹⁰⁰

The plague, then, provides a prime motive for Petrarch to reflect on his life's meaning, to explore and retain a commentary on his age and on himself throughout various moments of his maturity. The pestilence of 1348 urges him to compose his peculiar form of autobiography. He constantly revised and extended it, in outward structure indeed imitating Cicero's collections, but molded inwardly by the incessant pressure of his introspection. It may be considered as the Latin pendant to the *Decameron*, a linguistic brother to the energetic, extroverted vernacular work. If Boccaccio's *brigata* appears at times insouciant, it has nonetheless anxiously departed from the infected, ravaged city. In Petrarch's discussion of the plague, we uncover a way of thinking that corresponds to the historical approach of the *Decameron*.

Familiars VIII.7 is Petrarch's most extensive statement on the Black Death. Written in 1349 again to Socrates, the tone is both accusatory and defensive, as he searches to come to terms with the event and with his reluctant response to it:

On account of this [calamity] I may perhaps be excused before an indulgent judge, if he were to weigh that it is not something trivial causing me such pain, but rather the year 1348 of the sixth age, which robbed not only me of my friends but the entire world of its people. . . .¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ 1.1.22: "Ego, in exilio genitus, in exilio natus sum, tanto matris labore tan-
toque discrimine, ut non obstetricum modo sed medicorum iudicio diu exanimis
haberetur; ita periclitari cepi antequam nascerer et ad ipsum vite limen auspicio
mortis accessi." A. Bartlett Giamatti cites this passage from Petrarch in his essay
"Hippolytus among the Exiles: the Romance of Early Humanism" in *Exile and Change
in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984), 12-32. While Giamatti is right
to emphasize how, for Petrarch and Boccaccio, this sense of exile was essential for
self-discovery, he does not attend to the importance of religion for Petrarch and
his feeling of *continual* exile from the past and the present, in keeping with his new
ontology.

¹⁰¹ VIII.7.11: "Qua in re benigno sub iudice forsan excuser, si ad examen venerit
illud quoque, non leve aliquid, sed millesimum trecentessimum quadragesimum

While sizing up the macrocosmic magnitude of the plague, Petrarch nonetheless focuses on the event as a personal occasion for grief. Unlike Boccaccio he is not scrutinizing a concrete city-scape, with its undulating variety of people and their responses, but rather examining his own fluctuation of feeling. The grief, he states, has taken his mind and his writing outside its normal channels of expression:

Nor shall I deny some shame; for I sensed both mind and style, once the rein of reason was shaken off, were dragged outside the intended harness and so move according to my emotions: nothing can disturb me more.¹⁰²

This inner ‘disturbance’ Petrarch laments highlights a major difference between his more Stoical cast of thought and the attitude of Boccaccio. Yet as Petrarch struggles for adequate means of expression, to return to a measure of mind and of literary form, he voices the sense of incredulity shared by his friend. The mortality, in its swiftness and completeness, is unprecedented:

Will you believe such things, posterity, when we ourselves seeing them now scarcely believe them, and would hold them to be dreams unless we observed them fully awake with open eyes? And, even having wandered through the city filled with funerals and returning home to find it empty of those dearest to us: do we still know for sure those things to be true about which we grieve?¹⁰³

One discovers here that relation that formed the empirical core of knowledge in Boccaccio’s exposition, the relation between eye-witness and authority, seeing and believing, even in the expression of

octavum sexte etatis annum esse quem lugeo, qui non solum nos amicis, sed mundum omnem gentibus spoliavit. . . .” For the dating of this letter, see Wilkins, *Petrarch’s Correspondence*, 62. Petrarch’s *epistola metrica* I.14 (*ad se ipsum*), discusses the plague in a related vein. Boccaccio records the date of this verse letter in his *Zibaldone laurenziano* as 1340; Wilkins and others now think it was written in 1348. See Petrarch, *Poesie latine*, ed. Guido Martellotti and Enrico Bianchi (Turin: Einaudi 1976), 128–136; *Lo zibaldone boccaccesco mediceo laurenziano Plut. XXIX.8*, ed. Guido Biagi (Florence 1915), c. 73r–73v; Wilkins, *Studies on Petrarch and Boccaccio*, ed. Aldo Bernardo (Padua: Antenore, 1978), 63.

¹⁰² VIII.7.10: “Nec me tamen erubuisse negaverim; sensi enim animum ac stilum, excusso rationis freno, extra destinatum iter affectibus iunctos trahi; quo nichil molestius pati possum.”

¹⁰³ VIII.7.13: “Credes ista, posteritas, cum ipsi qui vidimus, vix credamus, somnia credituri nisi experrecti apertis hec oculis cerneremus, et lustrata urbe funeribus suis plena, domum reversi, expotatis pignoribus vacuum illam reperientes, sciremus utique vera esse que gemimus?”

doubts about one's own perceptions. Although Petrarch also resembles Villani in asking whether subsequent generations will dare to fathom the immensity of the event, his amazement over the plague's fury leads him not to indict humanity for its sinfulness, but rather to remain silent, awe-struck: all preconceptions are put to the test when one views with open eyes the force of vast, raging, sudden death:

When was anything like this ever seen or heard? In which annals was it ever read: empty houses, abandoned cities, ruined fields, the earth bursting with corpses, and horrible, vast solitude throughout the entire world? Consult the historians: they are silent; ask the physicians: they grasp for answers; query the philosophers: they shrug their shoulders, wrinkle their brows, and press their finger against their lips for silence.¹⁰⁴

“Consult the historians, they are silent”: here is another, explicit indication that the records and formulations of past writers are of little help to the humanist who witnesses the plague. The philosophers, including those within the Church, have nothing to say. Here we may recall how Passavanti avoided this history in his *Mirror of True Penitence*. If we take Petrarch at his word, there is no tradition, no authority that gives sufficient meaning or expression to the event, that sensibly articulates the why and wherefore for its happening:

And indeed we have come through this sudden change of things, in order that in ourselves it may be shown whether we can rightfully repeat the splendid statement of Epicurus: “We provide for each other a theatre large enough”: which, if it may truly be said of us—for how much longer? Or who can foresee to what point we may yet trust in the stability of this theatre, as now one, now another of the columns gives way? . . . Man is too frail an animal and at the same time too proud, building too high upon too fragile foundations.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ VIII.7.12–13: “. . . quando unquam tale aliquid visum aut fando auditum? quibus hoc unquam in annalibus lectum est, vacuas domos, derelictas urbes, squallida rura, arva cadaveribus angusta, horrendam vastamque toto orbe solitudinem? Consule historicos: silent; interroga physicos: obstupescunt; quere a philosophis: humeros contrahunt, frontem rugant, et digitulo labris impresso silentium iubent.” Cf. Falsini, “Firenze dopo il 1348,” 435 and n. 32: “I documenti delle Arti [del Comune] al riguardo tacciono quasi del tutto. . . . Il silenzio denuncia una paralisi generale dell’attività dei cittadini.” See also Petrarch’s remark on the Plague in *De otio religioso* 35.32–36.2 (*On Religious Leisure*, 54).

¹⁰⁵ VIII.7.22–23: “En quo subita rerum mutatione pervenimus, ut experiri liceat in nobis, an preclarem illam Epycuri vocem iure possimus dicere: ‘Satis magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus.’ Quod, et vere dici possit a nobis, quandiu tamen dici

The ‘columns giving way’ surely refers to more than the deaths of their friends. Considering Petrarch letters to and conversations with classical and Christian authors, might he be addressing the stability of their authority as well? How valid, how trustworthy are the experiences of the past, when the present brings new, unimagined peril? The Black Death certainly challenged the ecclesiastical cosmos: one reads this directly in Boccaccio’s, indirectly in Villani’s narrative. It is worth investigating, if outside this study, the crisis the plague produced in the appreciation of the classical world. If ecclesiastical dogma was placed in doubt, why not also classical dicta? The humanists’ own writings record their shock, and also their scepticism toward all forms of received knowledge. All histories of misfortune since the Deluge, Petrarch writes, have been “delights, a game, a refreshing pause” [“delitie . . . et ludus et requies”] compared to the present troubles (VIII.7.15).

Boccaccio’s narrative, in its anxious scrutiny of events, shows his freedom in relation to contemporary and classical descriptions of the plague. Petrarch, exhibiting a scepticism similar to that of Boccaccio, seeking to restore the adequate measure to “mind and style,” puts to use the same stylistic attribute of antithesis. This is evident not only in the internal dialogue within the letter and in his repeated address to Socrates. It also marks his syntax and sentence structure, as is evident from the passages already cited: “not only friends but the entire world of people;” “city filled with funerals . . . home . . . empty of the dearest.” When Petrarch finds his voice, it speaks also with a style that reflects a kinship to Thucydides. Petrarch, more openly than Boccaccio, writes that his choice of style was personal, not only developed in the course of maturity, but born in the pressure of existential crisis.¹⁰⁶ His letters therefore serve as an hermeneutical commentary on Boccaccio’s choice of historical method.

In accord with Petrarch’s professed amazement, the turns and contrasts of his sentences allow him no simple fixed explanations, none of the unimpeachable unequivocal causes that Villani would assert.

poterit? aut quis augur statuatur, quorsum nobis datum sit de huius mutui theatri stabilitate confidere, altrinsecus nutantibus iam columnis? . . . Nimis caducum simul ac superbum animal est homo, nimis alte fragilibus superedificat fundamentis.” The adage of Epicurus is cited by Seneca, *Ad Luc.* 7.11.

¹⁰⁶ Compare the emotional crisis with Laura, in which of course the plague plays a decisive role, and also the opposites in the poetry of the *Canzoniere*.

Like the chronicler, Petrarch investigates the religious dimensions of the mass mortality: but he does not remain passive under the accusation of guilt, and his antithetical perspectives resist such an unequal sentencing:

I do not pretend that we have not deserved these miseries, and even worse ones: but as our elders have deserved them, why not also our descendants. . . . Why, when [their] examples of fault are not lacking, are examples of punishment missing? While we all have sinned, we alone are scourged.¹⁰⁷

Petrarch wonders whether God's mercy has been finally exhausted, but he adds: "If this is true, we pay the penalty not only for our crimes, but at the same time for those of our fathers. . . ."¹⁰⁸

Petrarch's troubled inquiry brings him to consider, if only momentarily, a notion of God's emotional absence: "May it perhaps be true what certain great intellects have suspected: that God does not care about mortal things?" Petrarch in turn rejects this suspicion, with the support of no other than Seneca (and more quietly Augustine): "If he did not care, these thinkers would not have life. . . . Indeed you care about us and our concerns, Lord."¹⁰⁹

Within this conclusion the dialectical echo from the "great intellects" still reverberates, for the very reason that the plague remains inexplicable. This suspicion about divine neglect finds no place in Villani's account, and he resorts to the theological concept of God's "absolute will." Petrarch avoids such phraseology; his complaint revolves restlessly between alternatives and is rounded by unknowing:

Here there is utterly no remedy, no solace: and it only adds to the weight of the disaster not to know the causes and origin of the evil. And surely neither ignorance nor the very plague is more odious than the trifles and fables of those who weigh in on all subjects, knowing

¹⁰⁷ VIII.7.14: "meremur hec quidem et graviora, non infitior; sed et maiores nostri meriti sunt, atque utinam non et posterii mererentur! . . . quid est quod cum culpe non desint, desunt exempla supplicii? Cum omnibus peccavimus, flagellamur soli."

¹⁰⁸ VIII.7.17: "Quodsi est, non nostrorum modo sed paternorum simul criminum penes damus. . . ."

¹⁰⁹ VIII.7.18–19: "An illud fortasse verius, quod magna quedam ingenia suspicata sunt, Deum mortalia non curare? . . . si non curares, illa non subsisterent. . . . Curas profecto nos et nostra, Deus. . . ." See the questions and answers in *Confessions* I.2–4; Petrarch refers to Seneca's *De beneficiis* 4.8.2.

nothing: whose mouths, long accustomed to lies, are nonetheless silent; where they waxed forth with habitual impudence, at the end they have been closed by shock.¹¹⁰

Petrarch directs his bitterest words against those who profess to know those things which, he asserts, they cannot possibly know. Could not these words be pointed against the preachers and the moralists, who, like Villani, would turn the plague's history into an *exemplum* of religious edification? Petrarch will close the door on these moral deductions with a final antithesis: "Whatever the causes might be, and however hidden, the effects of the plague are most obvious."¹¹¹ We may consider his contrast between hidden causes and obvious effects to articulate the silence of Boccaccio's more empirical, less introspective narrative. Boccaccio does not attempt to determine the supernatural influences behind the outbreak of the disease. His eyes are focused, as we noted, on what he saw in front of him, on the analysis of human behavior in a disintegrating society. Looking more directly at historical events, he deliberates less than Petrarch about the mind of the historian. As Petrarch for his part seeks to compose his own lasting record of the calamity's effect, he applies his poetic talent toward more explicit philosophical investigation that emerges obliquely in the *Decameron*.

In the final section of his letter to Socrates, Petrarch relates the macrocosmic events to the microcosmic, personal level. He has, it appears, perceived that the devastation calls into question the stability of the ecclesiastical and even classical cosmos. The specter of the finitude and futility of human effort, both moral and epistemological, comes to roost in Petrarch's mind: not only the outer world is threatened with chaos, but the inner—spiritual and mental—world revolves in a dark universe. The poetic *animus* searches for a style with which to compose itself. The style once found, however, creates more questions than conclusions; with an eloquent finishing string of interrogatives Petrarch exclaims:

¹¹⁰ VIII.7.16: "Hic remedii nichil prorsus, nichilque solati est; cumuloque cladis additum, mali causas principiumque nescire. Nam nec ignorantia nec ipsa quidem pestis odiosor nugis ac fabulis quorundam tamen ora, licet assuefacta mendaciis, tandem silent, et que impudentia primum ex more laxaverat, ad ultimum clausit stupor."

¹¹¹ VIII.7.19: "Ceterum, quecunque sine cause, quamlibet abditte, effectus aperitissimi sunt."

We were a crowd; now we are alone. . . . And just think: even as we speak, we ourselves are fleeing and passing away in the manner of shadows. . . . What are we then, dear brother, what are we? Will we not put down our pride? . . . How heavy, how slow, how fragile are our bodies; how blind, how restless our minds; how fickle, how uncertain, how mutable our fate!¹¹²

Petrarch takes the loss of his friends and extends this loss metaphorically. Their sudden death signifies, in a universal way, the uncertain timing of certain death; furthermore, most inwardly, it highlights the instability of the self. Time wears down the body. Mental observations dissolve in the flow of existence. What one knew yesterday one forgets tomorrow; one discovers tomorrow what one often overlooked. This awareness of how time changes both the perceiver and the perceived announces a new conception of ontology that we see Boccaccio employ in his narrative of the plague, a conception that expresses how time conditions all things.

Both Petrarch and Boccaccio exhibit the obsession with mutability that becomes a hallmark of the Renaissance. The plague furthered Petrarch's meditation on mutability; he also reacted to the Black Death in his verse letter *Ep. met.* I.14.93–94: “Thus time confounds all and life runs past in its instable course” [“Sic omnia miscens / tempus et instabili transcurrit vita meatu”]. Petrarch had begun this mediation earlier, reflecting upon Heraclitus in the *Books of Things Worthy of Remembrance*:

Truly the restless motion of heaven leaves nothing unmoved in its circuit; nothing remains even of those things which we judge to be most permanent; nor do the works of men or of nature escape change and passing. . . . These things are made and in the same moment they have been made: time pulls all along with it, absorbs all, surrounds and confounds all, permits nothing to remain.¹¹³

¹¹² VIII.7.21,23–25: “Stipati eramus, prope iam soli sumus. . . . et ecce, dum loquimur, ipsi etiam fugimus atque umbre in morem evanesCIMUS. . . . Quid ergo sumus, frater optime? quid sumus? nec desinimus superbire. . . . quam gravi, quam tardo, quam fragili corpore, quam ceco, quam turbido, quam inquieto animo, quam varia quamque incerta volubilique fortuna!”

¹¹³ *Rerum mem.* III.80.4–5: “Irrequietus enim celi motus nichil in hoc ambitu linquit immotum, nichil manet eorum etiam que solidissima iudicantur; nec opera tantum hominum sed nature alterantur et intereunt. . . . Hec fient simul et facta sunt; omnia secum tempus trahit, omnia absorbet, omnia circumvolvitur ac miscet, nichil stare permittit.” See also *Fam.* XXIV.1 and Seneca's *Ad Luc.* 58.23f.

Petrarch's penetrating indictment of human certainty of metaphysical truth in the *Familiares*, this scouring of the traditional assumptions of human epistemology, summons its own classical reference, a letter of Cicero to Atticus. But as Petrarch expresses it, his own experience is the touchstone. This strain of scepticism will bear fruit throughout the Renaissance with its ultimate formulation in Montaigne's *Que sçay-jé?*¹¹⁴ For the Trecento Petrarch is giving voice to the existential underpinnings of a new method of historical inquiry that finds its first application in Boccaccio's narrative of the plague.

It is worth noting how this sensibility of Petrarch relates to his more conventional historical writings. The historical treatise that occupied Petrarch's attention at this time was his biographical series *Lives of Illustrious Men* [*De viris illustribus*]. Petrarch began the work a good ten years prior to the plague of 1348, yet he was to revise it repeatedly up till his death, with a major recasting of its concept in the years immediately following the Black Death.¹¹⁵ In the cited letter to Socrates (VIII.7) he mentions the *Lives*, imagining interlocutors who rebuke him for neglecting these biographies and for recording instead the history of his own, personal grief:

We were awaiting from you heroic verses; we read elegies instead. We were hoping for the histories of illustrious men; we now find a single history of your own sorrow. . . . And what will be the measure or the limit, if you wish to lament the fate of all mortal beings?¹¹⁶

In the opening pages and chapters of the *Lives*, Petrarch's newfound scepticism leaves its mark. Displaying a keen sensitivity to time's passage, he cautions his future readers in his Preface not to judge him too harshly if they should discover accounts different from the ones he presents. Instead his readers should "meditate on the discord of histories, which often raised doubts in Livy, who lived at a time so much closer to these events [of the biographies]."¹¹⁷ Every historical conclusion, he implies, is provisional.

¹¹⁴ VIII.7.24; the reference is to *Ad Att.* XII.11. See Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Essay II.12 in *Complete Works*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1958), 393.

¹¹⁵ 1351–1353; see references in Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus*, ed. Guido Martellotti (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), ix–xii.

¹¹⁶ VIII.7.5–6: "Prestolabamur ex te carmen heroicum, elegos legimus; historias virorum illustrium sperabamus, unam cernimus propriis doloris historiam. . . . Et quis erit modus aut quis finis, si omnium fata mortalium deplorare volueris?"

¹¹⁷ Pref. A 5: ". . . quamobrem siqui futuri sunt, si huiusmodi lectione versati aut aliud quicquam aut aliud dictum reperierunt quam vel audire consueverint vel leg-

In the first of his biographies, that of Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, Petrarch comments upon Livy's reservations about the story of Romulus's mysterious death. It was said he vanished in a storm while in the midst of his army, an event Petrarch calls "amazing and almost unbelievable" (*Rom.* 35: "mirum et pene incredibile"). Some people claimed, Petrarch notes, that Romulus was taken into heaven; others stated that he was murdered by the Senate, which concealed his corpse from the people. To these explanations Petrarch adds a third, found in Augustine, that Romulus was destroyed by the fury and lightning of the storm itself, "whose power is ineffable and whose workings are hidden." This rage of natural force, Petrarch adds, deafened and overcame those standing closest to the ruler. What can one make of these interpretations? Petrarch concludes: "... the freedom of opinion and judgment about ambiguous matters is multifaceted, yet the truth is only one. But this very truth about Romulus's demise, as about many other things, is profoundly hidden."¹¹⁸

The conditioning of one's insight by the movements of time and emotion was intensified by the experience of mortality wrought by the plague. For Petrarch and Boccaccio there emerges an 'uncertainty principle' about human knowledge possessing far greater sway than we see in the work of either their contemporaries or their predecessors, and indeed of many historical writers who followed after them.

Boccaccio's inquiry, we have seen, has focused on the concrete, the empirical, the volatile and variable modes of living he claims to have observed during the worst ravages of the Black Death. Honor

ere, hos hortor ac moneo ne contestim pronuntient, quod est proprium pauca noscentium, cogitentque historicorum discordiam, que tanto rebus propinquorem Titum Livium dubium tenuit." This quotation comes from the shorter Preface A that Petrarch wrote in the 1370's; he composed the first Preface B, from which he edited Preface A, after the Plague, between 1351 and 1353. *De viris illustribus*, xii.

¹¹⁸ *Rom.* 42-43: "Potest et illud fortisan credi, quod quidam suspicati sunt, neque in celem divinitus sublatum neque in terris humanitus laceratum, sed tempestate ipsa atque impetu fulminis absumptum, cuius ineffabilis vis et operatio latens est, idque omnibus qui aderant quo propius eo magis attonitis atque inscius, accidisse. Et opinionum quidem in rebus ambiguis iudiciiue libertas multiplex, veritas una non amplius; sed hec ipsa in Romuli exitu, ut in plerisque aliis, alte latet." I am grateful to Ronald Witt for referring me to this biography. Cf. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 3.15. Livy's *History* 1.16 conveys the first two viewpoints on Romulus's death without the explicit scepticism and conclusion of Petrarch. See a similar statement on Pope Celestine's "great refusal" in *De vita solitaria*: "Quod factum solitarii sanctique patris vilitati animi, quisquis volet, attribuat—licet enim in eadem re, pro varietate ingeniorum non diversa tantum, sed adversa sentire—; ego in primis et sibi utile arbitror et mundo." Petrarch, *De vita solitaria/La vie solitaire*, trans. and ed. Christophe Carraud (Grenoble: Millon, 1999), 2.VIII.12, p. 256.

and charity moved some people to attend the sick, but fear moved many more to neglect them, and among these there arose different, contrasting pursuits of preserving body and mind. No Florentine citizen understood either the genesis or the pathology of the disease, and this general ignorance, confronted with universal danger, created a fertile environment for fears and fantasies to grow. Conventions, no matter how venerable, could not prevent the civic dissolution. “No man was his own,” and the empty city became the tragic arena from which the *brigata* would depart to compose its own comedic sense of order and decorum under the shadow of death.¹¹⁹

Boccaccio’s narrative of the plague presents a counter-point not only to Villani’s chronicle but also to Petrarch’s more personal musings. This account forms a new moment in historiography composed during the Trecento that needs to be brought into context with the forms of historical writing that would emerge through the efforts of Bruni, Valla and others. Scholars have often focused on these later humanists and their conscious re-appropriation of classical historians.¹²⁰ Thus Arnaldo Momigliano has asserted that medieval historians “invented ecclesiastical history and the biography of the saints, but did not try to Christianize ordinary political history”; classical historiographical approaches, which emphasized political affairs, were only re-developed in the fifteenth century.¹²¹

The chronicles of both Villanis would seem to call the first claim into question, and Matteo, as we have seen, attempts to place the events surrounding the Black Death in harmony with the assumptions of ‘salvation history.’ With regard to the Quattrocento revival of classical modes of historical writing, already in the Trecento distinct hallmarks of classical composition surface in Boccaccio’s account, not to mention in the earlier work of Mussato and Ferreto.¹²² Understandably there has been a tradition of scholarship that assumes Boccaccio must have read Thucydides, even if there is no direct evidence to support this assumption, and even if it would explain very

¹¹⁹ See Usher, “Boccaccio’s *Ars Moriendi* in the *Decameron*.”

¹²⁰ See for example Kelley, *Faces of History*, 130–141 and Mark Phillips, “Representation and Argument in Florentine Historiography,” *Storia della storiografia* 10 (1986): 48–63, which remark on the development in historiography between Petrarch and Bruni, omitting Boccaccio.

¹²¹ “Pagan and Christian Historiography” in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, 114–115.

¹²² See Witt, *Footsteps*, 130–165.

little had he done so. In the same light the habits of mind of the Quattrocento historical writers did not result necessarily from the improved availability of the classical texts. It is worth investigating to what degree these later writers received an impulse from the method of inquiry first articulated by Boccaccio.

At the very least the immediate literary followers of Boccaccio did not share his sense of scepticism born amid the exigencies of life and death. For his late fourteenth-century *Novelle*, Giovanni Sercambi also has his story-tellers flee the plague in Lucca. But his account of the plague includes a religious confession very close to the understanding of Matteo Villani and of the Dominican clergy, viewing the pestilence as a physical punishment for sinfulness.¹²³ His *brigata* counts friars and priests among its number, and is led by the wealthy man Aluisi, who voices its devotion to traditional hierarchy, order and moral authority.¹²⁴

The sources of a writer's historical understanding and method are difficult to discern and it is precarious to pin them on a single external event in his lifetime, let alone upon an author he may have read. Petrarch's meditations of mortality and human ignorance preceded 1348; Boccaccio's antithetical style for the purposes of prose narrative can be glimpsed in his earlier, fictional autobiography, the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*.¹²⁵ But the Black Death afforded both writers the opportunity to push their investigations of human knowledge to

¹²³ Giovanni Sercambi, *Novelle*, ed. Giovanni Sinicropi (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 5–6: “E pertanto non è da meravigliarsi se alcuna volta la natura umana pate afflizioni e guerre e pestelenzie fame incendi rubarie e storsioni; che, se da’ peccati s’astenesse, Idio ci darè’ quel bene che ci promise, cioè in questo mondo ogni grazia e inne l’altro la sua gloria. . . . E non è da meravigliarsi se ora in MCCCLXXXIII la moria è venuta e neuna medicina può riparare. . . .”

¹²⁴ *Novelle*, 6–7: “Cari fratelle e a me maggiori, e voi care e venerabili donne che qui d’ogni condizione sete qui raunate per fuggire la morte del corpo e questa pestilenzia, prima che ad altro io vegna, dirò che, poiché diliberati siemo per campare la vita e fuggire la peste, debiamo eziandio pensare di fuggire la morte dell’anima, la quale è più d’averne cura che lo corpo.” It is hard to imagine this speech in the *Decameron*, unless it is followed by some ironic reversal.

¹²⁵ E.g. “E certo il sonno m’era alcuna volta più grazioso che la viglia, perciò che quello che io con meco falsamente vegghiando fingeva, esso, se durato fosse, non altramente che vero mel concedeva.” *L’Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, ed. Vincenzo Pernicone (Bari: Laterza, 1939), 54. See Petrarch’s *De otio religioso*, begun in 1347: “cecitatem anime seipsam nescientis, ridiculam ignorantiam rerum variarum” (37.5–6, *On Religious Leisure*, 56; also 39.5–8, *On Religious Leisure*, 58). The *De otio* is difficult to date with precision and other passages in this section relate to the Plague and events as late as 1356, such as the Basle earthquake.

an extent unmatched in their earlier works. The mass mortality of friends, citizens, countrymen and peoples strengthened their creative confrontation with the forces of life and death, giving their writings an unparalleled authenticity.

In Boccaccio's plague-narrative one discovers aspects of historical writing that, according to Momigliano, are characteristic of classical historiography: his reliance on direct experience, rather than on the distant past, emphasizing the distinction between direct experience and hearsay; his focus on major change, especially the decline of past institutions and the appearance of new ones; and, perhaps most significantly, his lack of pre-suppositions about ethical norms and the absence of moralizing about human vices.¹²⁶

Not coincidentally Momigliano notes that all major Greek historians, when compared to the local annalists, were detached from society, in fact "almost invariably exiles or at least expatriates."¹²⁷ Boccaccio, who was illegitimate, educated in Naples, only lately returned to Florence, may have felt this distance, this sense of isolation in his father's city, much as Petrarch proclaimed his life an irrevocable condition of exile, begun "under the omen of death." What is subject to less speculation is the new emergence in the *Decameron* of a historical recounting that, if more self-conscious about the nature of its credibility, is nonetheless a Trecento cousin to classical interpretations of history, while possessing less consanguinity to the conventions of salvation history.

¹²⁶ "Tradition and the Classical Historian," 162–166.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

CHAPTER THREE

MORALITY'S HAZY MIRROR: THE HUMANIST MODALITY OF MORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE *DECAMERON*

The ten young Florentines who narrate the hundred stories of the *Decameron* are also exiled from their city, having departed on account of the civic dissolution wrought by the Plague. They therefore display the humanist concern with composing one's "mind and style" in accord with their existential circumstances. They address this concern not only to one another, but primarily to the reader, and illustrate Boccaccio's poetic effort to restore a community, one which would partake, if only fictively, in a common ethos. But in what does this ethos consist, and how is it determined? The clearest sense of its contours comes forth in comparison to the mendicant means of moral instruction, notably the *exemplum*. For if the *exemplum* gained its validity by conveying moral truths of metaphysical certitude, we have seen how Boccaccio and Petrarch questioned the solidity of this certitude. In the *Decameron* Boccaccio has his narrators present a different mode of achieving ethical insight, a mode rooted in the individual's ability to assess a moral analogy in his or her own terms. This ability, according to the humanists, gathered its strength in a paradoxical way, by appreciating the flawed, human quality of all moral communication. A moral truth must be spoken, and understood, contingently, in the flow of time and with a sensorium colored by one's personal character and mood.

Over the last twenty years scholarship has increasingly concerned itself with medieval sermons and their use of the *exemplum* to convey a moral lesson for their audience. The term *exemplum* designated for late-medieval moralists an episode from a saint's life, or a person living a model life, or, at its most allusive, the symbolic interpretation of natural phenomena.¹ Whatever the particular designation, the

¹ The last signification of *exemplum* is found in the *Summa* [or *Liber*] *de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum* by Giovanni da San Gimignano.

exemplum displayed, as its literal sense indicates, an example to be followed, and its moral force derived from the conception that religious perfection was ultimately determined by one's volition, a volition, to be sure, guided and strengthened by grace.² The analysis of various *exempla* has provided scholars of religious, cultural, social and intellectual history a shared field of inquiry: the *exemplum* forms a bridge between scholastic and popular theology, verbal and visual or Latin and vernacular modes of expression, dogma and natural science, and not least between piety and poetry.

For the Italian Trecento this research on the *exemplum* has been particularly fruitful, ranging from Delcorno's writings to the multi-volume publication of the *Racconti esemplari*.³ Italian scholars have been able to build upon the foundations laid by Levasti, Getto, Petrocchi, and Battaglia, to name several, and the study of *exempla* has also enriched the pursuits of art historians, most notably in the examination of the frescoes in the Camposanto in Pisa, which portray the Thebaid fathers and the Triumph of Death.⁴

Despite this scholarly groundwork, insufficient attention has been devoted to the relation between the Tuscan preachers or religious writers and their humanist contemporaries composing secular prose or poetry. This relation, in the case of the *Decameron*, reveals critical features of the contrast between medieval and Renaissance culture.

² See the compilation of scholars' views of the *exemplum* by Carlo Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa e l'antica predicazione volgare* (Florence: Olschki 1975), 191–193, and by Vittore Branca, “Studi sugli *exempla* e il *Decameron*,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983–4): 178–189, 182–3.

³ Among the primary sources: Guiseppe de Luca, ed., *Prosatori minori del Trecento* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1954); Levasti, ed., *Mistici del duecento e trecento*; Giovanni Pozzi and Claudio Leonardi, ed., *Scrittrici mistiche italiane* (Genoa: Marietti, 1988); Cesare Segre, ed., *Volgarizzamenti del due e trecento* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1969); and Varanini, *Racconti esemplari*. Among the scholarly analyses, see Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*; Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa* and *Exemplum e letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bologna: Mulino, 1989); Getto, *Letteratura religiosa del Trecento*; Petrocchi, *Ascesi e mistica trecentesca* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1957) and “Metodi di lettura degli scritti ascetici trecenteschi,” in *Dante Petrarca Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in honor of Charles S. Singleton*, ed. Aldo Bernardo and A.L. Pellegrini (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1983), 353–366; and Natalino Sapegno, “La letteratura dei minori” in *Storia letteraria del trecento* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1958), 339–97.

⁴ Cf. Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Parole e immagini nella letteratura italiana medievale: materiali e problemi* (Rome: Gruppo editoriale internazionale, 1994) and her *Ragionare nel giardino*; and Luciano Bellosi, *Buffalmacco e il “Trionfo della Morte”* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974).

What connections of historical importance can we discover between Boccaccio's hundred stories and the *exempla* recounted by the friars active in and around Florence?

In one of Delcorno's essays, he notes the Dominicans' role in teaching doctrine in Trecento Tuscany, and he sees in the *Decameron's* "complex thematic score" "the remarks on contemporary eremitism and the parody of certain motifs inherent in the monastic tradition."⁵ Citing several instances in which *Decameron* narratives present variants on *exempla* (e.g., IV.intro., III.10, II.6), Delcorno claims that the work "indicates the inadequacy of the penitential culture imposed by the preachers" and that Boccaccio may have viewed the Pisan frescoes as "a project of penitential life completely at odds with the ideals expressed in the *Decameron*."⁶ Delcorno's view, in so far as it emphasizes the *Decameron's* break from mendicant sermonizing, complements Battaglia's earlier analysis of the story of Tito and Gisippo (X.8), a story which shows, in his words, how "ethical and social values are no longer able to emerge as categorical and normative."⁷

The research of these scholars, however, does not elaborate upon the nature or the implications of the contrast between the *Decameron* and medieval *exempla*. While the passages recounted by Delcorno and Battaglia underscore Boccaccio's knowledge and revision of individual *exempla* and saints' lives, their assessments do not engage the broader, formal relation between the *Decameron* and this tradition. In fact the *Decameron* exploits the characteristics of Trecento *exempla*, especially their purpose of teaching moral acts through a prescribed visual model, in order to develop a new modality of moral communication.⁸

⁵ Delcorno, "Modelli agiografici e modelli narrativi: Tra Cavalca e Boccaccio," *La novella italiana: Atti del convegno di Caprarola, 19-24 settembre 1988* (Rome: Salerno, 1989), 350: "complessa partitura tematica" "le notazioni sull'eremitismo contemporaneo e la parodia di alcuni motivi proprii della tradizione monastica."

⁶ Delcorno, "Modelli agiografici," 354, referring to Balducci in IV, intro. ("l'insufficienza della cultura penitenziale imposta dai predicatori"); and 351 ("un progetto di vita penitenziale del tutto opposto agli ideali espressi nel *Decameron*").

⁷ Salvatore Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del medioevo* (Naples: Liguori, 1965), 511: "i valori etici e sociali non possono continuare a risultare categorici e normativi. . ."

⁸ Delcorno has recognized this quality of the *Decameron*, but his studies of the *Decameron's* treatment of the *exemplum* concentrate on identifying sources of separate stories, not to the overall thematic relation between them: "Ironia/parodia" in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 179. In another essay that investigates more general features of Trecento piety, Delcorno emphasizes the "l'ampiezza e la coerenza della manipolazione letteraria e della dimistificazione ideologica esercitata dal Boccaccio sul *corpus* della letteratura esemplare" ("Metamorfosi boccacciane dell' 'exemplum'" in: *Exemplum*

The *Decameron's* use of *exempla* may be noted on two levels. The *exempla* provide the background, even the vocabulary, through which the *Decameron* narrators can address their ethical concerns; yet the same *exempla* also serve as a foil for the narrators' criticisms of the Church's method of moral instruction. The *Decameron* therefore projects the *exemplum*-tradition through the lens of irony, allowing its readers to see the tradition with unprecedented sharpness and expose its limitations.⁹ I say "allows," for everything in the *Decameron* hinges on the possibility inherent in irony, which leaves its readers room for independent perspectives toward the same phenomena or story. The reader (or, in the case of the *brigata*, the listener) may then revise or affirm her perspective as time passes, as she hears later stories and reflects upon her own experience. It is this contingent quality of the *Decameron's* meaning, in tune with its awareness of temporality, that most clearly distinguishes it from the supposed universal, objective nature of the medieval *exemplum*. While scholars have studied the *Decameron's* critique of the *exemplum*-tradition, they have often overlooked how the work modulates its meaning through the subjective and the temporal, thereby clashing with the manner of mendicant instruction.¹⁰

e letteratura, 269). The essay however overlooks the stylistic invention of the *Decameron*, especially the interplay among narrator, *brigata*, and reader, focusing instead on the sources of specific *novelle*, in isolation from one another and the larger work. Battaglia's "Dall'esempio all' novella" also devotes its attention to a single episode, the friendship of Titus and Gisippus in X.8: Battaglia, 509–525.

⁹ Delcorno notes: "Egli [Boccaccio] infatti non si limita a utilizzare in chiave parodistica alcune fonti particolari, ma punta le armi dell'ironia contro intere classi di *exempla*, subordinate ai grandi temi della religione popolare, modellata e giudata dalla predicazione dei Mendicanti" ("Metamorfosi," 269). I differ from Delcorno in part by viewing Boccaccio's efforts not as an ideological effort, but rather as a poetic act that exhibits an understanding of human psychology and epistemology at variance with the understanding expressed by most of the mendicant preachers.

The sentence of John D. Lyons might be applied to Boccaccio's work: "... the consciousness that an example [*exemplum*] is not merely *any* narrative but a narrative with a claim to a particular sort of truth (the relationship of general class to particular instance) is what allows sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers to use example in a highly ironic way." (*Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989], 12, author's emphasis).

¹⁰ Battaglia notes Boccaccio's attempt "a trasferire l'emblematicità esemplare nel probabilismo dell'esperienza" (*La coscienza letteraria*, 512), but he does not sustain this conclusion through a continued analysis of episodes from the work, nor does he concentrate on the relation between narrator and audience. Alfonso Paoletta does not sufficiently differentiate the *exemplum's* force of persuasion from that of the *Decameron*, overlooking the irony and subjectivity of discourse in the latter, which is

The new potentialities of the *Decameron* are exhibited by its form, not least by the work's larger framework. Boccaccio subverts the ecclesiastical center of the *exemplum*-tradition by using ten lay narrators, including seven women. Even when these narrators tell stories with 'morals' or lessons, the reader is instantly challenged to assess their remarks, accept them or reject them, without recourse to clerical authority. A key support of medieval tradition, the theological and social status of the clergy, has been knocked away, and one is left to consider the worth of the tales in one's own terms: a liberating, anxious moment. No one narrator in the *Decameron* assumes the

conveyed also by the historical individuality of its characters (*Retorica e Racconto: Argomentazione e Finzione nel "Novellino"* (Naples: Liguori, 1987), 37–38, 110–112). Due attention to these qualities of irony and subjectivity is also missing in the writings of two other commentators. Karlheinz Stierle stresses how contingency is a feature of the novellas that distinguishes them from *exempla*; yet his reference to a "new temporal dimension" opened up by contingency is not elaborated, and in particular this dimension is not extended beyond the novellas themselves, to the experience of the audience: "Three Moments in the Crisis of Exemplarity: Boccaccio-Petrarch, Montaigne, and Cervantes," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 4 (1998): 582. Winfried Wehle discusses the "kritische Konkurrenz" between the "das doktrinaire Verfahren" of the *exempla*-tradition and the "induktive Verhaltenshermeneutik" of the novella: "[das moralisch oder ideal Verbindliche] wird dadurch einem Prozeß der Entvereindeutigung unterzogen, der die mittelalterliche Tradition figuraler Sinnvereinbarungen im Lichte der 'epistemologischen' Alternative des Humanismus geschichtlich verzeilt. Eine moralische Bedeutungsfestlegung von Geschichten erfolgt nicht mehr nur applikations-, sondern erfahrungsvermittelt": *Novellenerzählen: Französische Renaissancenovellistik als Diskurs* (Munich: Fink, 1981), 64. While I agree with this distinction, Wehle details its validity for the French novella, not the *Decameron*; he also does not explore how the awareness of irony fosters the reader's experiential understanding, and how this awareness is developed through a sequence of stories told over time. Millicent Marcus, in her *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the 'Decameron'* (Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1979), claims perceptively in her reading of *Dec. I.1* that Boccaccio makes "the *exemplum* discredit itself," that he "sever[s] the conventional bonds between concrete experience and transcendent truth implicit in the *exemplum*, forcing his readers to examine the expectations they bring to the text, and to revise them in the light of dissonant and jarring narrations" (12–13). She does not place the *Decameron* tales in context of the techniques found in contemporary mendicant *exempla*, nor in relation to a larger humanist thematic. And while she is right to emphasize, at the end of her study (108), that Boccaccio appeals to the reader's own moral interpretation (citing Robert Hastings, *Nature and Reason in the 'Decameron'* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1975], 6), she does not, in her own analysis, close the hermeneutic circle: she refrains from elaborating upon the ways in which the *Decameron* addresses the reader's realm of experience. For in her view "the *exemplum* posits a continuity between the work of art and the world beyond the text"; the *Decameron* stories "exist in a space apart from factual reality" (101). As we shall see, the *Decameron* in fact pre-supposes a critical relation between ethical truth and experience, even as it sunders "the conventional bonds."

mantle of moral spokesperson.¹¹ We see then a cultural prefiguration of Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication: the absence of objective moral authority allows the ethical meaning to be communicated indirectly, in a way that requires the reader to appropriate the meaning for himself.¹² In terms of Renaissance humanism, the *Decameron* presents its own, more radical version of the *dictum* repeated by Petrarch in his letters: while external authority carries some weight, personal experience is the touchstone in determining what has moral value or is worthless.¹³

The challenge the reader faces in discovering the meaning of a narrative is heightened by the transitory nature of the sequence of stories told over ten days, or two weeks, counting the days of rest.¹⁴ Stories told later in the first day respond to earlier ones, revising or underscoring their messages.¹⁵ Each storyteller too is scrutinized by the others and elicits their reactions. He or she also commands the reader's evaluation as a moral messenger. The flow of time and history, in which both the narrators and their audience participate, establishes a coherence for the hundred stories not found in other collections of tales, such as the *Novellino*.

In addition to demanding this coherence, the temporal flow in the *Decameron* conveys the sense of movement and mutability, and of the

¹¹ Thus I part company on this point with Vittore Branca, who calls Pampinea "la 'saggia'" and "la più ricca di avveduta umana e, spesso, l'autorevole 'portavoce' dell'autore." *Boccaccio medievale*, 20, 43n. Branca's sentiment is followed by Victoria Kirkham, who says she "personifies Prudence": *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 13.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1972), I:273: "Communication;" also *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. and trans. H.V. and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), pt. II ch. 2, 72–79. It is questionable to assume that, for Boccaccio, the ethical is always present as a theme. Entertainment, the aesthetic, may obscure the ethical from time to time, as Boccaccio indicates in his *Proemio* 13–15.

¹³ E.g. *Familiars* I.3.3, III.6.3; also emphasized in the *Secretum* 2.1.10, 2.3.3, 2.14.5. This relation between experience and authority will be examined in detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁴ Story-telling is suspended on Fridays and Saturdays, between days II and III and between days VII and VIII.

¹⁵ See Delcorno's remarks on Decameronian self-parody in day IV, under the influence of Dioneo: "Ironia/parodia" in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 187. While parody is one element of this response in day I, we shall observe other, less obvious connections among storytellers. Marcus sees a competitiveness among the narrators only in Day X (*Allegory of Form*, 96), whereas this essay will note this feature already in the first day of story-telling.

mediation of meaning by a particular *persona*. Among the narrators distinct personalities come forth, Emilia's the most intriguing; the reader must account for their points of view, and read the stories in light of the subtle shifts of narrative perspective. By contrast the traditional use of *exempla* presents each *exemplum* like a monastic cell: complete and entire, evenly illuminated, and ultimately at rest. The stasis of the *exemplum* is exhibited in the formal divisions of the Thebaid of the Camposanto in Pisa and in the narrative fragmentation of the saints' lives in the *Golden Legend*.¹⁶ The mendicant *exemplum* is immured by its moral, behind which the personalities of both preacher and reader are hidden from view.¹⁷ If Boccaccio would exhibit certain qualities of this more traditional approach in his later works *On Famous Women* [*De mulieribus claris*] and *On the Fall of Illustrious Men* [*De casibus illustrium virorum*], the *Decameron* radically reconstructs the manner of moral expression, a manner in which temporality and subjectivity condition the ground of utterance.

The ecclesiastical writers we have examined for their influence on mid-Trecento piety are for the most part Dominican, or, such as Matteo Villani, ones who show the mendicant perspective in their work. As we have seen, these writers wrote in both Latin and the vernacular, for clerical and lay audiences. Despite their differences in approach and even subject matter they shared the conception that the *exemplum* provided a pattern for moral improvement by portraying models of behavior established by clerical authority.

Given the significance of the *exemplum* as a visual model of behavior, we may note a second, closely related term that surfaces among Boccaccio's mendicant contemporaries: the mirror or *speculum*. Domenico Cavalca, in his *Lives of the Fathers* [*Vite de' santi padri*], claims that he translated [*recato in volgare*] the *bellissimi esempli* of the holy fathers "recognizing that the life of the saints is a living reading

¹⁶ Among the elements of the *exemplum* Branca notes its "finalità e inquadramento suadorio e didattico," "Studi" 183. See Hayden Maginnis's discussion of the "episodic character of the frescoes" in Pisa, which helps create their "departure from naturalism": *Painting in the Age of Giotto: A Historical Reevaluation* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State UP, 1997), 141–144.

¹⁷ See Mulchahey's discussion of the development of collections of *exempla* for Dominican teachers and preachers, "*The Bow is Bent in Study*," 458–473. In Petrarca's *De vita solitaria*, the various *exempla* of saints and poets and philosophers are all linked by the common theme of solitude, and presented through the personality of the author's voice.

[*una viva lezione*] . . . and as it were a mirror where man can ponder and engage in self-reflection [*specchiare sé*] and by this means amend and direct his own life. . . .”¹⁸ Similarly, in his *Mirror of the Cross* [*Specchio della croce*], he calls Christ a “book and mirror of all perfection.”¹⁹ The *exemplum* is thus brought into relation with *speculum*, similar to the way one might associate ‘model’ with ‘paradigm.’ The mirror of behavior creates the opportunity for self-reflection. Because both *exemplum* and *speculum* put forward a visual example for the reader to follow, one that uses deeds (*opere*) and not merely words (*parole*), they ‘reflect’ to the reader the state of his (or her) perfection or imperfection.²⁰

The ecclesiastical writers are conscious of the *exemplum*’s mimetic power when promoting a person as a model to their audience. The *exempla* may emphasize, within the narrative itself, the need to reduplicate not just the saint’s efforts, but also the struggles of those who overcome adversity through the saint’s spiritual help. They therefore present to the reader the ideal disciple as well as the ideal teacher. This doubling is portrayed in the popular if controversial treatise, Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls* [*Mirouer du simples ames*], as

¹⁸ “conciossiacosache la vita de’ santi sia una viva lezione . . . e quasi uno specchio ove l’uomo può considerare e specchiare sè, e per questo modo la sua vita ammendare e dirizzare. . . .” *Vite de’ santi padri*, ed. Bartolomeo Sorio (Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco, 1858), 13.

¹⁹ “libro e specchio done perfezione,” *Lo specchio della croce*, *Newberry Library* MS 129, s. xiv, lv; in other mss. “lume e specchio”: cf. the modern edition *Lo specchio della croce*, ed. Tito S. Centi (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1992), 26.

²⁰ Giovanni da San Gimignano in his *Summa de exemplis* compares Scripture to a mirror, citing Gregory I as his source. His reasoning is comparable to that of Cavalca’s thoughts on the Fathers, namely that the *speculum* of Scripture shows us the degree of our beauty or ugliness, of our perfection or lack thereof: “Scriptura sacra assimilatur speculo. Unde Grego. dicit: Scriptura sacra mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur: ut interna nostra facies in ipsa videatur. Ibi enim feda: ibi pulchra nostra conspicimus: ibi sentimus quantum proficimus: ibi a profectu quamlonge distamus” (l.ix, cap. 66).

Cf. also how Passavanti, in his Prologue to his *Specchio della penitenzia*, refers to Jerome, “la cui vita e la cui dottrina sono essempro e specchio di vera penitenzia,” as his precursor and concludes: “. . . imperò che in questo libro si dimostra quello si richiede di fare e quello di che altri si dee guardare acciò che si faccia vera penitenzia, convenevolmente e ragionevolmente s’appella Specchio della vera Penitenzia.” 6–7.

It is important to observe, if outside this study, how the major clerical prose writers attempted to adapt the *exemplum*-tradition to their Trecento audience by emphasizing and incorporating more dramatic moments in their narratives. Boccaccio, by contrast, may be said to employ this tradition in order to break from it decisively.

well as in the miracle legends of the Virgin, the *Miracoli*. One reads at the *Mirouer's* outset about a princess, who, after painting an image of the distant, noble Alexander, dreams of him through a second, internal image.²¹ The miracle-stories of Mary, made popular throughout Europe in sermons and collections, are a series of *exempla* in which the fallen priest, nun or knight is saved through devotion to the Virgin.²² Porete's *Mirouer* and the *Miracoli* therefore not only present *exempla* or *specula*; they also show, in the course of the *exemplum*-narrative, how readers are to use these models. These works emphasize the moral value of this use, of the active 'reflection' of the model. The Trecento reader, trained as he or she is in the art of association, may come to view his or her life as that of the pious sinner before the Virgin or the princess seeking her king. And would not the reader see the nobility of the Virgin or Alexander in those that are preaching the *exempla*, in the clergy, who are responsible for their spiritual cure?

Cavalca was preoccupied by the question of the clergy's role as *exemplum*. Boccaccio and he share a concern about the moral authority of the clergy, and respond in different ways. As a moment in Trecento cultural history, their differences shed light on the distinction between the sensibilities of mendicant teaching and Renaissance humanism at this time.

The ecclesiastical authority that has promoted the *bona exempla* encourages Cavalca, in his *Mirror of the Cross*, to regard the clergy

²¹ "Or entendez par humilité ung petit exemple de l'amour de monde, e l'entendez aussi pareillement de la divine amour. . . . Adonc fist elle paindre ung ymage qui representoit la semblence du roy, qu'elle amoit, au plus pres qu'elle peut de la presentation dont elle l'amoit e en l'affection de l'amour donte elle estoit sourprinse, et par le moyen de ceste ymage avec ses autres usages songa le roy mesmes." Marguerite Porete, *Speculum simplicium animarum / Mirouer du simples ames*, ed. Romana Guardini, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievalis LXIX* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), 10–12.

²² To cite two titles for this series, contained in the *Miracoli della gloriosa Vergine Maria* Florence 1483 (Hain 11225): "Come una donna per operatione del demonio fece uccidere suo genero e fu liberata della gloriosa vergine maria" [4] or "Duno chavalere giovane che venne inpoverta e poi per bonta della beata e gloriosa vergine Maria divento riccho" [75]. The material aims of this piety, the sensual nature of these stories, stressing beauty and lust, and their narrative structure, relying often on an act of deception, will be considered more fully in relation to the *Decameron* in chapter 6. Delcorno has emphasized the oriental, patristic tradition of *exempla*, at the expense of these more fantastic narrative inventions from the thirteenth century. For a scholarly introduction to the miracle-stories, cf. Ezio Levi, ed., *Il libro dei cinquanta miracoli della Vergine* (Bologna: Romagnoli-dall'Acqua, 1917), xi–clxviii.

itself as a mirror of purity for the laity: “the ecclesiastical ministers must be mirrors through which the laity must engage in self-reflection and in the ministers’ saintly lives acknowledge their own uncleanness and their flaws and thereby correct them.”²³ It is consistent with the Church’s teaching that the clergy, as Christ’s representatives, should approach the standards of behavior laid down by the saints and Christ himself and become a “living reading” for their congregations. Taddeo Dini expresses this clearly in a sermon, perhaps to his fellow Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella: “. . . just as the saints through their martyrdom and penances are mirrors not only illuminating the divine congregation but even igniting love within it, so too we, because we ought to be the mirror of the laity and because the rule we follow is called a mirror [*speculum*], must sustain many tribulations and penances so that we can say: we are put to death: the Apostle calls us to this Col. 3[:5]: ‘put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth.’”²⁴

But a cleric of Cavalca’s sensitivity, involved as he was in issues of moral reform, also perceives the problem with clerics as *exempla* or *specula*: what of the influence of the bad, immoral clergy? We hear Cavalca’s sharpest critique of clerical decadence, rivaling that of Petrarch: he holds these clerics accountable for the sinful actions of the laity: “But truly today one can say that on account of the wicked examples which come forth from a number of secular clerics and religious clerics, laypeople are becoming coarse and are avoiding the cleansing of themselves and are not giving glory to God, because the clergy’s life is not a mirror of truth, but of great iniquity, so that the laity believes it might be permitted to do that which it sees done by those very people who ought to be instructing them. . . .”²⁵ As elsewhere in much of medieval anti-clerical criticism,

²³ “. . . gli ministri ecclesiastici debbono essere specchio ne liquali gli seculari si debbono specchiare e ne la loro sancta vita conoscano la loro immonditia e la loro macula e si la correggiano.” *Lo specchio della croce*, ed. Centi, 56 (ch. 46).

²⁴ “. . . sicut sancti per martiria et penitentias sancti sunt specula non solum illuminantia ad dei congregationem sed etiam inflammantia ad dilectionem sic nos quia debemus esse specula mundorum et regula quam tenemus speculum dicitur, oportet nos sustinere multas tribulationes et penitentias ut possimus dicere mortificamur: ad hoc monet nos apostolus Col. 3[:5]: ‘mortificate membra nostra quae sunt super terram’”: *Sermones*, fol. 128^v.

²⁵ “Ma veramente hogi si puo dire che per gli mali esempli che procedono dalquanti chierici seculari e chierici religiosi, gli seculari se brutano e non si mondano e non danno gloria a dio perhoch’ la loro vita non e specchio di verita, ma di

the very ideal contained in the clerical vows damns the many clerics who fail to live up to this ideal. But how, at this moment of crisis, are the laity to know which examples to follow, which to avoid, when the mirrors, in which they should gaze, are themselves flawed, when those responsible for exemplary behavior instead lead one toward perdition? This troubling question may have prompted the Dominican to translate the *Lives of the Fathers*—and perhaps for not only, as he claims, “simple and illiterate [i.e. non Latin-reading] people.”²⁶ Cavalca’s answer to this problem is incomplete: “. . . but he who would be wise [‘chi fusse savio’] would not attend to the life of the wicked priests and false religious, but attend once more to the life of the good, both those who lived in the past and those still present.”²⁷ “Chi fusse savio”: but indeed how does one become “wise” and learn to distinguish the good from the bad *exempla*? Cavalca refrains from exploring this pedagogical conundrum any further.

But this conundrum is a focal point of the humanists. Petrarch’s *On the Life of Solitude* describes as pernicious the vacillating tendency [*instabilitas*] of one’s elders because it “shields itself with authority and works harm by its example.” And Petrarch perceives in everyone, including himself, an innate and deep-seated desire to imitate, fostered by pride:

For though a man’s nature may have enough vices of its own, most evils arise from a spirit of emulation and a lust to imitate. And what imitator has ever been content with limiting himself to the error of his guide? We take pleasure in flying over, surveying and leaving behind those whom we used to follow.²⁸

molta iniquita, si ch’ gli secolari reputano quasi licito di fare quello che vedano fare a quelli i quali gli doverebbero ammaestrare. . . .” *Lo specchio della croce*, ed. Centi, 56 (ch. 46).

²⁶ “uomini semplici e non litterati” *Vite de’ santi Padri*, Prologue, 13.

²⁷ “. . . ma chi fusse savio non guarderebbe a la vita di mali sacerdoti e falsi religiosi, ma riguarderebbe ne la vita de buoni che sono passati e di quelli che sono presenti.” *Lo specchio della croce*, ed. Centi, 56 (ch. 46).

²⁸ *The Life of Solitude*, trans. Jacob Zeitlin (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1924), 172, with revisions; *De vita solitaria*, 1.IX.11–12 (150): “. . . et autoritate se contegit et exemplo nocet. Etsi enim cuiusque natura suis vitiis abundet, magna tamen pars malorum ex emulatione quadam imitandique libidine nata est. Nam quis unquam imitator sui ducis errore contentus fuit? Transcendere delectamur et conspici et, quos sequebamus, post terga relinquere.” S.a. his criticism of changing fashions in clothing, music, and especially in writing style and manner of speech: “preceps et importuna nec suis unquam contenta finibus . . . imitatio” [1.IX.15 (154)].

This vain pursuit of imitation, he states, should be countered by the counsel of one's own judgment and the tendencies of one's own nature.²⁹ It is likely that Petrarch chooses his examples for his book on solitude because they ultimately, and paradoxically, refer the reader back to the individuality of the reader's character and the lonesome responsibility to reach his own decisions.³⁰

The *Decameron* storytellers, both in their actions and in their narratives, treat this problem of following *exempla* as a main thematic point of departure. It was "shameless examples" [*disonesti esempli*], which the seven young women viewed "like death itself" [*come la morte*], that moved them to leave the plague-stricken city.³¹ And in the first of the *Decameron* stories, the narrator Panfilo presents a fictional antithesis to the urban decay. In Florence the innocent fall to corruption and indignity; yet Panfilo recounts how in Burgundy the wicked Cepparello is laid to rest with honors, as a model of sanctity for others. Cepparello's vice is concealed from the friar and the townspeople by his false confession and his elaborate, splendid burial. The fraudulence of his life and the preacher's eulogy, however, are obvious to Panfilo's audience. Boccaccio's *brigata*, and by implication his wider readership, are aware that a great deal in moral instruction depends upon the ethical sensibility of both teacher and student, of both the teller of the *exemplum* and his readers. Genuine moral development, the *brigata* indicates, cannot be catalyzed simply by the preaching of *exempla*. The preacher may too often be compromised, either venal (as Filomena's friar in III.3), duped (as Panfilo's friar in I.1), or duplicitous (as Dioneo's Brother Onion in VI.10). Correspondingly, his audience may be either too imperceptive or, increasingly, too cynical. The *Decameron* confirms the crisis in the

²⁹ In addition to virtue, advice of friends and established custom: I.IX.16 (154): "Quomodo enim fieri potest, ut vivendi tenor idem maneat his, qui non virtuti, non suo iudicio, non amicorum consiliis regendos, sed emulationi, sed aliene demencie stultorumque furoribus se volvendos tradunt? Denique qui naturam propriam exuunt, patrios mores abiciunt, nichil nisi peregrinum atque adventitium venerantur. . . ."

³⁰ See however Petrarch's citation of the saints in *De otio religioso* as examples to follow of "subduers of the flesh": "imo vero quot sancti, tot sunt carnis proprie domitores": *De otio* 80.1-2; *On Religious Leisure*, 112.

³¹ Pampinea tells her six companions: ". . . io giudicherei ottimamente fatto che noi . . . di questa terra uscissimo, e fuggendo come la morte i disonesti esempli degli altri onestamente a' nostri luoghi in contado . . . ce ne andassimo a stare. . . ." [Intro.65].

exemplum-tradition between the conventional model of sermonizing and the heightened perception of clerical frailty, and it responds by showing a new way of narrating moral problems to a more sceptical readership.

Boccaccio's storytellers are therefore concentrating not on directly preaching moral truths as knowledge, but on presenting various moments in which readers may achieve insight into human nature. The stories employ new methods of aligning the perspectives of narrator and reader, an alignment necessary to any genuine communication. Like other humanist texts, the *Decameron* liberates rhetoric and epistemology from a metaphysical, doctrinal purpose and practices them in an individualized manner that recognizes the capacity of the reader to listen.³² Boccaccio's work attends to the process of becoming aware of the human capacity for goodness and wickedness, a process buoyed by time's potentiality, rather than to the certain measurement of moral goodness, which is the aim of the *exemplum*.

While investigating the *Decameron's* status as a moral text, however, scholars have often applied in their analysis pre-conceived categories or definitions, and have overlooked the temporal movement that conditions the abilities of both the storyteller and his or her readers.³³ Commentators have struggled to reconcile the obvious

³² See Brian Vickers's article on "Rhetoric" in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, 731.

³³ Kirkham, in her discussion of the *Decameron's* morality, omits reading the work through its narrative personalities. Without this reading, her claim for a "moral system" tied to scholastic notions of morality founders on counter-examples of acts performed with impunity, and on the critique the storytellers exercise on each other in the aftermath of the moral dissolution wrought by the plague. See her "Morale" in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 252–3. Similar problems face Janet Smarr's conception that the *Decameron* stories present "an idyllic vision of a possible or at least hoped-for rational government of the self and society." *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 174. Marcus takes an opposite approach, asserting that "no interpretation is final and that critics must be open to ever more inclusive, never conclusive readings" (*Allegory of Form* 108), although this statement itself sounds apodictic. In a related vein see Mazzotta's "Reflections on the Criticism of the *Decameron*" in *Approaches to Teaching Boccaccio's 'Decameron'*, ed. James H. McGregor (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000), 70–78. For a perceptive summary of the differing views of the *Decameron's* moral purpose, see Robert Hollander's "The Proem of the *Decameron*" in *Boccaccio's Dante*, 92. He characterizes four positions towards the *Decameron's* moral intention as 1) traditional Christian/humanist moral vision; 2) literature of amusement, "escape"; 3) a new moral vision inimical to the old order; and 4) his own, in which the *Decameron* examines the human incapacity to live in harmony with morality or nature, and seeks an artistic expression commensurate to this problem.

variety of the book's events with a uniform moral vision that would provide an objective meaning to the work.³⁴ The variety or 'inconsistency' of the *Decameron*, however, is created precisely by its multitude of narrators, talking and acting in time, underscoring how Boccaccio uses the force of temporality to qualify any attempt at moral objectivity. In contrast to the clerical *exemplum*, the temporal flow is not irrelevant to the *Decameron*, nor is temporality ancillary to a prescribed moral purpose, as one finds, for example, in the allegory of Death in the frescoes at Pisa. On the contrary the temporal, subjective form of discourse, in which every storyteller and reader is vested with his or her own historical individuality, is the medium through which the *Decameron's* moral design is expressed. The quandary in deciding on the consistency or inconsistency of Boccaccio's work may be resolved only if we look first at Boccaccio's practice of the art of communication, among his characters and between his narratives and their readers.

The difference between *exemplum* and narrative in the *Decameron's* first day can be characterized as one between a static and a dynamic cosmos, between a universe in which the clerical estate would objectively identify the moral good, and a world in which moral evaluation of behavior is inherently subjective.³⁵ This does not mean that the ethical good ceases to be as an objective reality, but its presence or absence must be assessed by everyone, in relation to his or her own individual existence. The moral truths are less self-evident than the clerics would like them to be, and in fact need not be the same 'truths' that the clerics advocate. By presenting its alternative to the

Hollander's view, of the four, is most compatible with the *Decameron's* ironic, indirect form of utterance, and with its treatment of the *exemplum*, but like the other positions it puts forward a conceptual claim on the work's content without fully analyzing how the work's form might color this claim. An essential component of this form is the way it addresses the temporal, historical situation of the listener.

³⁴ See Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 149–153; and Teodolinda Barolini, "Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375)," 526.

³⁵ It was Burckhardt who early identified this subjective quality of Renaissance culture, although he associates the subjective with the secular: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Harper, 1958) 2:473 (VI.3). See also the developments in fourteenth-century scholasticism (Ockham, Jean Buridan, Gregory of Rimini, Nicholas of Autrecourt), whose relation to humanism has scarcely been studied. This omission has been noted by Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Thought of the Italian Humanists: Anticipation of the Reformers or Autonomy?" in *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 241–244.

mendicant world-view, Boccaccio's work marks a critical moment in the early Renaissance history of ideas.

I center the analysis on the first day of story-telling. The ten narratives of this first day find their own common ground; the continuity among the stories emerges gradually, in the process of their narration. Unlike the themes pronounced on following days, no deliberate motif is put forward, toward which the *brigata* must address their tales; and in contrast to Day IX, in which a theme is consciously avoided, the first day is more experimental and less structured. The rules for story-telling have not been explored or tested, and so the *brigata* appears only to begin a process it would later revise. Moreover the first day finds the Florentines responding to their vivid memories of the Plague and their dislocation from their city. Thus the theme they hit upon seems to be more spontaneous, less pre-meditated, and a more accurate representation of their thoughts and feelings as the theme takes form organically between one narrative and the next.

In discerning Boccaccio's art of moral communication, we examine three episodes from this day told by the narrators Neifile, Filostrato, and Pampinea. Each episode responds to the story immediately preceding it. Neifile's story of I.2 concerns the Jewish merchant Abraam, who, urged to convert by his Christian friend Giannotto, travels to Rome and observes the decadence of the papal clergy, and then adopts the Christian faith. This story picks up on the theme of divine goodness that Panfilo introduced in his opening tale. Filostrato in I.7 recounts how Bergamino persuades Can Grande to be more generous to him by describing the encounter of Primasso, another poor artist, with the Abbot of Cluny. Filostrato's narrative refers to the previous story told by Emilia in I.6 of the layman who mocks the greedy Franciscan inquisitor. We close by examining Emilia's mysterious ballad at the day's end. Her song, in its proclaimed self-absorption, reacts critically to Pampinea's remarks illustrated in her tale of I.10. Pampinea, who has been designated by scholars as the moral leader of the *brigata*, narrates how the lady Malgherida dei Ghisolieri is embarrassed in her attempt to make fun of the respected doctor Alberto of Bologna.³⁶

³⁶ See references to Branca and Kirkham, above, n. 11.

Although we may conceptualize this analysis as a series of three pairs, we shall uncover in all these episodes an ironic commentary on the traditional notion of motivating people in the moral life through the *exemplum* or *speculum*. In fact the sequence of the stories creates a different type of ‘mirroring,’ engaging the active participation of Boccaccio’s readership as a second *brigata*: the subsequent narratives reflect the ideas of the previous ones, forming an ever-deepening, implicit critique of the human capacity to make moral judgments that transcend time and circumstance.

Scholars have identified the first day’s theme as the power of the *buoni motti*, the clever speech or repartée.³⁷ This conception should be revised more precisely, for the idea of *buoni motti* fails to account for the developments in either Panfilo or Neifile’s narratives, the first two tales of the day, nor does it point out the object of this wit. What we observe in this opening string of stories are not just clever words, but words directed against authority, both secular and spiritual. Pampinea in fact rebukes her companions for their irreverence, though we shall see how her exception nonetheless proves the rule.³⁸

Neifile, as did Panfilo in his tale of Cepparello, also introduces her story with a moral: her story, like Panfilo’s, will underscore to what degree God’s all-suffering goodness (*benignità*), “provides its own proof of its unerring righteousness by bearing patiently the defects of those who in word and deed ought to be its true witness, and yet behave in a precisely contrary fashion” [I.2.3].³⁹ This introductory moral is

³⁷ Cf. Branca’s note 2 to I.10.20 (*Decameron*, 1:121).

³⁸ See Smarr’s observation that in the *Decameron* “the witty use of language” helps “form a bridge across social boundaries” (*Boccaccio and Fiammetta*, 173). I question, however, her assertion that Boccaccio’s intention is “to restore society through an indirect address,” since it is possible that this use of language exacerbated social tensions and promoted irreverence.

³⁹ “. . . sostenendo pazientemente i difetti di coloro li quali d’essa ne deono dare con l’opere e con le parole vera testimonianza, il contrario operando, di sé argomento d’infallibile verità dimostri. . . .”

We should notice how far the shadow of the Plague extends over these opening stories. Both narrators, Panfilo and Neifile, emphasize God’s patient goodness in the face of human wickedness, as if to discount the idea of the Plague as punishment; cf. Panfilo’s conclusion I.1.90–91. But compare also Boccaccio’s statement in the first draft of the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, perhaps written in the 1350’s: “. . . il quale [nostro riconoscimento; i.e. pentimento] se a lungo andare non seguirà, niuno dubiti che la sua [i.e. di Dio] ira, la quale con lento passo procede alla vendetta, non ci serbi tanto più grave tormento, che appena supplicia la sua tardità.” *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, ed. Luigi Sasso (Cernusco: Garzanti, 1995), 7–8 (I. Red. 7). Sasso

reminiscent of the form of the traditional *exemplum*, for instance in the various episodes from the *Lives of the Fathers*.⁴⁰

But in Neifile's tale those who are impugned by their "defects" are the clergy, which is indicated not only by the story's description (the "depravity of the clergy" [I.2.1]) but also by its characteristic distinction between "word" and "deed," which corresponds to the clergy's visual and verbal instruction, edification through act and doctrine, through *exemplum* and *sententia* [*ammaestramento*]. Neifile presents an ironic *exemplum*, in which the power of the clergy's behavior as a mirror or model is used to subvert the traditional understanding of its influence. In her story we see Boccaccio and his narrators shifting the weight of the *exemplum*-method from clerical authority (proper behavior and preaching) to the lay reader (proper perception: listening, reading, understanding). Boccaccio's emphasis on the reader's responsibility and acumen will become, at the close of the *Decameron*, his first line of defense against his critics.⁴¹

This overturning of expectations is indicated by Neifile's phrase 'behave in contrary fashion.' The plot contains reversals not only for characters within the story but also for its readers. The connection between protagonist and reader accords with the purpose of the *exemplum* as a "mirror." Abraam, a merchant and additionally, she tells us, "a great master in Judaic law," is asked repeatedly by his fellow merchant Giannotto to convert. Giannotto's attempts, made "crudely in the way of most merchants," the refined narrator remarks, finally move Abraam to announce a visit to Rome and the Curia. As educated as he is, as trained in words and philosophy, he also desires to see how the Christian faith is put into action by its leaders: he will convert "if they seem to me such that I can comprehend both through your words and through them [the Roman clerics] that your Faith is greater than my own".⁴²

aply notes here the reference to Valerius Maximus, perhaps taken from San Concordio's *Ammaestramenti* 23.4.II.

⁴⁰ See Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 141–146, where she discusses how these titles may well have been written by Boccaccio in his late structuring of the *Decameron* manuscript.

⁴¹ Cf. Concl. 8 and 11: "Le quali, chenti che elle si sieno, e nuocere e giovare possono, si come possono tutte l'altre cose, avendo riguardo all'ascoltatore. . . . Niuna corrotta mente intese mai sanamente parole: e così come le oneste a quella non giovano, così quelle che tanto oneste non sono la ben disposta non possono contaminare, se non come il loto i solari raggi o le terrene brutture le bellezze del cielo."

⁴² I.2.9: "nella giudaica legge un gran maestro"; I.2.8: "così grossamente, come il più i mercantanti sanno fare"; I.2.11: "se essi mi paranno tali che io possa tra

Consonant with the *exemplum*-tradition, Abraam wishes to see doctrine made manifest by behavior, words by deeds. A Trecento Christian would demand no less. To cite the maxim uttered by San Concordio, “examples move more than do words.”⁴³ But Abraam’s desire is the occasion for Neifile’s satire, and, we have seen, for Cavalca’s distress. For Giannotto recalls to himself the vices of the Roman clergy, their lives as ‘mirrors of iniquity,’ and now does all in his power to dissuade Abraam from seeking such *exempla*. There are, he tells him, “greater masters and wiser men” in Paris who could answer all his questions about the Faith.⁴⁴

Neifile thus addresses the conundrum which Cavalca, in his honesty, could not surmount: if one must look to the clergy as *exempla*, as ideal Christians, what happens to one’s faith and one’s morals, if their lives are wicked? Giannotto’s despair over Abraam’s conversion appears to be justified.

Abraam returns from Rome and describes what he saw in words of moral criticism that are remarkably Christian, almost from a mendicant sermon: “. . . there was, in any one who seemed to me a cleric, no holiness, no devotion, no good work [*buona opera*] or model of pious living [“esempio di vita”] or of anything else, but rather lust, avarice and gluttony, fraud, envy and pride and similar things and worse. . . .” [I.2.24].⁴⁵ Apart from an almost complete list of mortal sins, Neifile places the phrase *esempio di vita* in conjunction with the clergy’s works, their *buona opera*, as the friars would have

per le tue parole e per quelli [chierici romani] comprendere che la vostra Fede si migliore che la mia. . . .”

⁴³ *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, III.13, p. 41: “Gli exempli muovono più che le parole.” This commonplace is expressed also by Cavalca, *Vite de’ santi Padri*, 13; and in the *Leggenda aurea*, §112 [117]; 2:957–8.

⁴⁴ I.2.14: “maggior maestri e più savi uomini”; one subtlety of Neifile’s satire is that it undercuts the significance of doctrine and scholastic theology, of which Paris was the capital. Abraam is not looking for the ‘masters’ and the ‘wise,’ but the good if unlearned clergy. He is responding, though a non-Christian, in the way the mendicant preachers of the Trecento requested of their faithful, in the way, in fact, Cepparello’s “holy friar” asked of his congregation: with a focus on the external sanctity of the blessed life. Cf. I.1.85: “E nella postolo, il santo frate, che confessato l’avea, salito in sul pergamo di lui cominciò e della sua vita, de’ suoi digiuni, della sua virginità, della sua semplicità e innocenzia e santità maravigliose cose a predicare. . . .”

⁴⁵ “. . . quivi niuna santità, niuna divozione, niuna buona opera o esemplo di vita o d’altro in alcuno che chierico fosse veder mi parve, ma lussuria, avarizia e gulosità, fraude, invidia e superbia e simili cose e piggiori. . . .”

done.⁴⁶ Giannotto, expecting the obvious, is then stunned by his friend's reaction to the clerical depravity and their nefarious "esempio di vita." Abraam's survey of the Roman clergy has led him not to reject, but rather to accept the Christian faith. He notes that Christianity is increasing, becoming "more lucid and clearer," despite the clergy's best efforts to undermine it. In contradiction to the outward appearance of the clergy, he "seems to discern" the Holy Spirit shining within the religion.⁴⁷ The ironic implications are rich here, and made possible by Abraam's ability to "discern" a meaning to his observations that runs opposite to the literal interpretation feared by Giannotto (and Cavalca): that bad clergy can only represent a bad religion. Giannotto, Neifile records, "was expecting a conclusion diametrically contrary to this one."⁴⁸ Neifile presents through Abraam a reading of *exempla* in which the individual reader is an active interpreter, who may reach conclusions opposed to expectations, that is, to the purported moral.

Even if the reader's independent interpretation offers a resolution to the fear confronted by Cavalca, about how to determine good from bad *exempla*, the mendicant preachers scarcely consider this independence and in fact discourage it. In Cavalca's translation of the *Lives of the Fathers* disobedience to clerical counsel entails its sinful consequence, as when a monk ignores his abbot's advice and "falls into fornication." The *exempla* from his collection uphold the moral superiority of the clerical estate over the lay, without reservation and ambiguity. Abbot Pamon, traveling to Alexandria with other religious, tells a group of laymen to "kneel down and do honor to these

⁴⁶ With regard to the phrase *esempio di vita*, cf. the Trecento *Corona de' monaci*, a translation and revision of the Carolingian *Diadema monachorum*: "Erano quasi ottanta monaci, e a tutti era esempio di santità. . ."; *Corona de' monaci*, ed. Casimiro Stolfi (Prato: Guasti 1862), 53 (ch. 15). For the association between *exemplum* and actions, as opposed to words of instruction, see Domenico Cavalca's *Lo specchio della croce*, where he describes Christ's gift of "lo [suo] parlare in amaestramento [.] la vita e la morte tuta in esempio." *Lo specchio della croce*, Newberry Library MS 129; 13v; ch. 5.

⁴⁷ I.2.26: "E per ciò che io veggio non quello avvenire che essi procacciano, ma continuamente la vostra religione aumentarsi e più lucida e più chiara divenire, meritamente mi par discernere lo Spirito Santo esser d'essa, sì come di vera e di santa più che alcun' altra, fondamento e sostegno." See Petrarch's statement in *De otio religioso* I.5, on the spread of faith as a sign of God's good will (Shearer, *On Religious Leisure*, 48).

⁴⁸ I.2.28: "aspettava dirittamente contraria conclusione a questa."

friars [*sic*], so that they bless you, for they often talk with God, and their mouths are blessed.” Cavalca emphasizes how a holy man’s fame through his actions and teachings [*esempli e ammaestramenti*] “brought many to know the path of salvation and perfection.” By contrast the secular world is clearly distinguished as a place of temptation and entrapment. Alluring women, a pious father informs his son, “are monks of the world, but have a different dress from our own.”⁴⁹

In addition to Abraam’s challenge to the Church’s authorization of meaning of *exempla*, his reaction raises another troubling consequence for the clergy. It bears repeating that the *exemplum* makes little mention of its specific narrator or audience. Sainly living, in the eyes of the Church, is not a category conditioned by time and place. Neifile’s Abraam represents a new, critical observer, not unlike the ten young Florentines. He reacts to the present Curia, fallen from its ideal glory—a reference to Avignon?—just as Neifile’s nine listeners respond to her tale in the Florentine countryside of 1348. The *Decameron*’s historical setting transforms the *exemplum*. It becomes a particular incident nonetheless possessing great significance for its immediate audience.⁵⁰ In kinship with Boccaccio’s own narrative of

⁴⁹ *Vite de’ santi Padri*, t. 1, c. 138 (p. 210b): “D’un monaco che per la sua inobbedienza cadde in fornicazione”; t. 1, c. 119 (p. 199b): “State su e fate onore ai frati, acciocchè egli no spesse volte parlano con Dio, e la loro bocca è santa”; t. 1, c. 143 (p. 212b): “Un monaco solitario antico e di gran fama istava in un monte nelle parti d’Antiochia, per li cui esempli e ammaestramenti molti venivano in conoscenza di via di salute e perfezione”; t. 1, c. 133 (p. 208b): “Figliuolo mio, questi sono monaci del mondo, ma non hanno quell’abito che noi.” The father will diminish the women’s attraction by this description, and there is a distinct association between *mondo* and *secolo*, as an arena from which the father wants to escape (“uscendo del secolo,” 208a). This chapter is a text parodied by Boccaccio’s story of Filippo Balducci and his son in his introduction to day IV of the *Decameron*.

⁵⁰ This idea of historicity in the *Decameron* may be found both in Dante and Petrarch, in Dante’s purported audience of 1300 to his *Commedia* and in Petrarch’s continued epistolary treatment of his experiences. A historical setting, by contrast, is missing from the *Novellino*.

Scholars have recognized how the *Decameron*’s stories transform the *exempla* through a more precise determination of the narrative setting; e.g. Chiara Degani, “Reflessi quasi sconosciuti di *exempla* nel *Decameron*,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983–4): 198. But Boccaccio determines the time, place and circumstance of the audience as well, and the epistemological consequences of this setting, too, need to be investigated. Degani remarks elsewhere, with specific regard to Boccaccio’s story of Filippo Balducci in IV.intro., that “[o]gnuno può trarre le sue conclusioni, nel bene e nel male” (200), yet she does not elaborate how the *brigata*, in light of its own concrete, particular experience, shows its independence of interpretation time and again, to the effect that the *exemplum* is not “rinnovato” (200), but, in its moral essence, overturned.

the Plague, Abraam's description of his observations emphasizes the importance of the phenomenon in history, of the specific temporal moment, as perceived by a particular witness. His account departs significantly from mendicant language through the pronounced subjectivity of his impressions, the repeated *mi parve*, "it seemed to me."⁵¹ And not only Abraam's role is at issue, but also that of Neifile and of the narrator of the *Decameron* as a whole. The attentive reader or listener cannot regard any comments as objective, but must determine their meaning through his or her own appreciation of events and of narrative character. This subjectivity of viewpoint, of narrator and audience in the *Decameron*, distinguishes its use of the *exemplum*-tradition from the method of the mendicant sources.⁵²

Abraam, the good reader of *exempla*, is himself designed to guide and 'mirror' the reader's response to the story. By being alert to nuance and the less obvious significance of the Roman clergy's corruption, he confirms Neifile's moral about divine goodness bearing

⁵¹ "... parendogli assai aver veduto . . . [I.2.22];" "... mi vi parve in tanta grazia di tutti vedere. . . e con ogni arte mi par che il vostro pastore. . . meritamente mi par discernere lo Spirito Santo. . ." [I.2.24–26].

⁵² The limitations of the clerical *auctoritas* were not lost to all mendicants, and among the Trecento Dominicans it is again Cavalca who recognizes the problem with the greatest sensitivity. Writing at the opening of his *Specchio della croce*, he asks his readers "ché pregino dio ché perdoni ala mia presonconia pero che dico quello ch' non opero / e mostro per alcuna sentia quelle cose che non o per experientia" *Specchio della croce*, Newberry MS, 1^v–2^r. This remarkable confession stands as the exception to the norm among his colleagues (such as Rainerio), who present their moral views with an impersonal style designed to erase any doubts about their objectivity.

The standpoint of Abraam and Neifile that subverts the *exemplum* extends to the very act of his baptism and confirmation. Here the Parisian masters are allowed their say. Giannotto, having given Abraam the Christian name of Giovanni, "appresso a gran valeni uomini il fece compiutamente ammaestrare nella nostra fede, la quale egli prestamente apprese: e fu poi buono e valente uomo e di santa vita" [I.2.29]. Neifile uses properly the verb *ammaestrare* in the sense of "instruct" or "indoctrinate." But does Abraam become "good and worthy" ["buono e valente"] on account of his conversion, his baptism, or his instruction? Neifile's readers will recall that it was precisely Abraam's integrity at the outset that led Giannotto to press for his conversion: "La cui dirittura e la cui lealtà veggendo Giannotto, gl'incominciò forte a increscere che l'anima d'un così valente e savio e buono uomo per difetto di fede andasse a perdizione. . ." [I.2.5]. We hear the same adjectives—worthy, good—describing Abraam now before and then after his conversion. The problematic relation between clergy and laity, already addressed in Abraam's reading of the Roman *exemplum*, presents itself to Neifile's listeners in this final sentence, this conclusion of her story. Rather than closing this troublesome narrative with a tidy moral, Neifile questions this very tidiness of moral conclusions, in the spirit of the contrary interpretations earlier introduced by the story's protagonist.

patiently those who violate their Christian calling. There are further associations between Neifile and her protagonist that bring her story into the wider context of the *Decameron's* opening day. Neifile is also perceptive and well-instructed in the moral psychology of the Church. This quality in turn is shared by other members of the *brigata*, especially Pampinea and Emilia. Partly on account of these common characteristics, Neifile's story cannot be read in isolation from others in Boccaccio's work. On the contrary, each narrative is incomplete by itself; the reader needs to weave the narratives into a whole, thereby also distinguishing the hundred stories from the *exempla* of holy lives.

Neifile, having encouraged her readers to follow the *exemplum* of Abraam, puts her own personality forward for their scrutiny. The *Decameron* narrator describes her as "adorned no less with courtly manners than with beauty" [I.2.2].⁵³ This combination of courtliness and beauty might seem the perfection of Florentine Trecento womanhood.⁵⁴ But a more critical faculty of a female character is at work here. Neifile has revealed her fluency with the mendicants' distinction between word and deed, *opere* and *parole*, and she is capable of appreciating and expressing Abraam's erudition, in his use, for example, of "esempio di vita" and his list of Roman vices. She is also quick to speak in her own voice, indicting clerical venality in terms worthy of a contemporary moralist, mendicant or otherwise: "... he [Abraam] found that generally all of the them from the greatest down to the least sinned without the slightest hesitation [*disonestissimamente*] in lust [*lussuria*], and not just in natural lust but indeed in the way of sodomites, without any restraint of shame or modesty. . . . In addition, he openly saw them to be universally gluttons, tipplers, drunkards, and, after lust, greater slaves to their bellies than to anything else, in the manner of brute animals. . . ." (1.2.19–20).⁵⁵

⁵³ "non meno di cortesi costumi che di bellezza ornata." Note the courteous manner of the narrator's description.

⁵⁴ E.g., the Marchioness of Montferrat, I.5; Bartolomea Gualandi, II.10; and the lady who fools the friar in III.3: "una gentil donna di bellezza ornata e di costumi, d'altezza d'animo e di sottile avvedimenti" (III.3.5).

⁵⁵ "... egli [Abraam] trovò dal maggiore infino al minore generalmente tutti disonestissimamente peccare in lussuria, e non solo nella naturale ma ancora nella sodomitica, senza freno alcuno di rimordimento o di vergogna. . . . Oltre a questo, universalmente gulosi, bevitori, ebbriachi e più al ventre serventi a guisa d'animali bruti, appresso alla lussuria, che a altro gli conobbe apertamente. . . ."

Neifile's use of the word "lust" [*lussuria*] shows an understanding of the mendicant psychology of sin beyond her sex. The Dominican Rainerio da Pisa, whose *Pantheologia* was a contemporary encyclopedia of scholastic terms, wrote that "lust is an inordinate appetite of venereal delight."⁵⁶ The "inordinate appetite" is indicated by Neifile in the adverb *disonestissamamente* and the phrase "without any restraint of shame or modesty." According to Rainerio, "*honestas* [purity] by its nature repels or tempers crude sensual impulses."⁵⁷ The quality of purity of mind [*honestas mentis*] consists in large measure of *rimordimento* and *vergogna*; or, in his Latin, *verecundia* and *pudicitia*, shame and modesty.⁵⁸ Both traits, like chastity, break or restrain sexual impulses (note Neifile's use of "restraint" [*freno*]); they even avoid the indications (*signa*) of the lustful: "hence just as chastity repels or represses and restrains [*refrenat*] the very admixture of sensuality: so too modesty is shame before the indications of the lustful. . . . because modesty reddens before, avoids and detests such indications."⁵⁹ In the absence of this restraint, this *freno*, the clergy, Neifile says, has become like "brute animals," lacking the highest human faculty of reason. This also accords with mendicant psychology. To Rainerio, the first evil of lust is that the "intellect is darkened or blinded by the gloom of sin."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ "luxuria est inordinatus appetitus delectionis veneree." Rainerio da Pisa, *Pantheologia* 2:66r.

⁵⁷ "honestas secundum rationem repellit vel moderat concupiscentias pravas." *Ibid.*, 1:250v. See also Cavalca, *Vite* t. 1 c. 132 (p. 207b): "Però quando l'uomo si sente muovere di movimenti disonesti disordinati, si guardi e pensi quale sia la cagione e secondo il bisogno ponga il rimedio."

⁵⁸ The three signs of *honestas mentis* are *conversatio extrinseca*, *verecundia* and *pudicitia* (Rainerio, *Pantheologia*, 1:250v); all are missing from the Curia in Abraam's view. For this relation between *onestà* and *vergogna* elsewhere in the *Decameron*, cf. Panfilo's description of Alatiel's seduction in II.7.29: ". . . più caldi di vino che d'onesta temperata, quasi come se Pericone una sue femine fosse, senza alcuna ritegno di vergogna in presenza di lui spogliatisi, se n'entrò nel letto" and its antecedent in Intro.29: ". . . a lui senza alcuna vergogna ogni parte del corpo aprire non altrimenti che a una femina avrebbe fatto . . . il che in quelle che ne guerirono fu forse di minore onestà, nel tempo che succedette, cagione."

⁵⁹ "unde sicut castitas repellit vel reprimit et refrenat ipsam mixtionem veneream: sic pudicitia est verecundia circa signa venereorum. . . . quod signa pudicitia erubescit, cavet et detestatur." Rainerio, *Pantheologia*, 1:250v; my emphasis. Cf. also *Decameron* II.3.8: ". . . senza alcuno freno o ritegno cominciarono a spendere. . . ."

⁶⁰ "intellectus obumbratur vel cecatur peccati caligne." *Ibid.*, 1:66–66v, also citing Gregory later: "Primum peccatum [luxuria] est cecitas menti, inquantum luxuria impedit intellectum et subvertit."

Neifile's personality and her words associate her story with the *Decameron's* introduction, in which the two narrators Boccaccio and Pampinea describe the social and moral disintegration caused by the Plague. Her criticism recalls Pampinea's defense of *onestà* in the Introduction: it was necessary for the *brigata's* self-preservation, not only physically but morally, to leave the *mali esempli* of Florentine scoundrels, among whom both secular and religious clergy must be counted.⁶¹ Pampinea precedes Neifile in her articulate and observant indictment of clerical misdeeds and hypocrisy, also employing the mendicant language of moral psychology, contrasting submission to unbridled "appetite" and obedience to reason and law.⁶² Neifile's reference, certain if oblique, to Pampinea's speech indicates that her story is to be read as a confirmation of Pampinea's reasoning and the *brigata's* subsequent actions. Just as Abraam is repelled by what he witnesses in Rome, the nominal capital of the Church (though not the actual seat in 1348), so too the *brigata* could depart from their native city and its licentious clergy, whose corruption is exacerbated by the Plague.⁶³

⁶¹ Both follow "solo che l'appetito cheggia," Pampinea says; for "e non che le solute persone, ma ancora le racchiuse ne' monisteri, faccendosi a credere che quello a lor convenga e non si disdica che all'altre, rotte della obediencia le leggi, datsi a' diletti carnali, in tal guisa avvisando scampare, son divenute lascive e dissolute" [I.Intro.62].

⁶² If we turn to the *Pantheologia*, we see Pampinea's charge supported by Rainerio's description of the power of *diletti carnali*. The *luxoriosus*, he says, "appetit diu vivere et voluptate diu frui; et per hoc desperationem incurrit futuri seculi: quanta dum mens detinetur carnalibus delectationibus, ad spirituales venire non curat sed eas fastidit. . ."; 2:66v. Rainerio refers here to *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae 153 c. 5. As we cited earlier in relation to Neifile, Rainerio sees the rational judgment obscured by the power of sensuality: ". . . nam in actibus venereis non est intelligere: et hoc propter delectationis vehementiam ex qua impeditur iudicium intellectus. . ." 2:66v.

⁶³ The tie between the swirling *saturnalia* of the Papal Curia and the Plague-shocked Florence is strengthened if one recalls Boccaccio's own account of the disease. He describes one group of inhabitants who, with a "proponimento bestiale," give themselves over to "il bere assai e il godere e l'andar cantando a torno e sol-lazzando e il sodisfare d'ogni cosa all'appetito che si potesse . . . senza modo e senza misura . . ." [Intro.21–22]. Even if Boccaccio shows an understanding for their actions in the irrational fear of death, he anticipates Neifile's "più al ventre serventi a guisa d'animali bruti . . . senza freno alcuno di rimordimento o di vergogna . . ." [I.2.20;19]. Her words *senza freno* find a stronger resonance in the account of the Plague by the moral chronicler Matteo Villani, whom we examined above. Villani condemns those survivors who ". . . si dierono a più sconcia e disonesta vita, che prima non haveano usata. . . scorrendo senza freno alla lussuria. . ." *Cronica*, 16 (IV.14–15; 18–20). Of Florence he says "[e] senza alcuno ritegno quasi tutta la nostra città scorse all' disonesta vita, e così, e peggio, l'altre città e provincie del mondo." *Ibid.*, 16–17, (IV.6–29).

Thus it is likely in this context that Neifile's audience would have understood her remarks, so notable given their contrast to her courteous ways, as a commentary not only on the disreputable Avignon Curia, but also on the social disorder resulting from the reaction to the Black Death. Her lay protagonist Abraam, in a contrary, unexpected way, responds positively to this chaos and malfeasance. Does not, the reader wonders, the *brigata* do the same by leaving the city? And to ask the question on another level of reading: may not this same reader be edified, and not corrupted, by the sensuality, confusion and deceit expressed in the stories the *brigata* recounts? Abraam upsets the commonplace underlying the mendicant *exemplum*: that the narration of immoral behavior provokes immoral desires in the reader.⁶⁴

Neifile's story of Abraam's travels advises the reader to entertain a perspective on events in opposition to their initial or obvious appearance. It serves not least to reiterate, in a subtler, more ironic form, the meaning attached by Panfilo to his story of Cepparello, the dying notary who dissimulates his perfidy under the guise of sanctity. The common people, he says, may be deceived by Cepparello's true nature, but God's goodness respects their pious prayers to the supposed saint [I.1.90]. Abraam, in his rectitude and intelligence, sees clearly the clerical venality—he is not deceived—yet at the same time he recognizes the divine spirit at work. In its indirect advice to its audience her tale also introduces Filostrato's story of Bergamino (I.7). The tales of the opening day, at first glance artlessly arranged, edify one another in reciprocal relation. For Filostrato uses the mendicant conception of *exemplum* and *speculum* to elucidate the *Decameron's* sense of effective storytelling and proper listening to this narration.

The title of Filostrato's tale evokes the clerical *exempla* as it connects story-telling to ethical correction: "Bergamino, with a novella about Primasso and the Abbot of Cluny, rightfully shames [*onestamente morde*] an avarice newly found in Messer Can della Scala."⁶⁵ Filostrato is quick to declare that Bergamino's effort will occur by way of literary association, not directly, but figuratively. Bergamino is one who

⁶⁴ Boccaccio refutes this assumption explicitly in his Epilogue: Concl. 11. But at the other pole, contrast Passavanti's *exemplum* of the young nun corrupted by the priest's inquiry about forbidden pleasure: *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 135–137 (dist. V cap. IV).

⁶⁵ I.7.1: "Bergamino, con una novella di Primasso e dello abate di Cligni, onestamente morde un'avarizia nuova venuta in messer Can della Scala."

“by means of a charming tale, representing through another story that which he wished to say about himself and Can Grande, ashamed messer Can della Scala, a great lord, of a sudden and uncommon stinginess that had appeared in him. . . .”⁶⁶

If Neifile understood her protagonist Abraam to represent the student of *exempla*, an association analogous to that between the penitents in the mendicant stories and their readers, Filostrato now develops further the *Decameron*'s irony of the *exemplum*-tradition. His tale describes not only the acute observer of *exempla*, as Abraam is, but also the ideal tellers of *exempla*: Bergamino and, in the role of protagonist within Bergamino's own story, Primasso. Like Neifile, Filostrato uses the connotations of the *exemplum*, which are so familiar to his Florentine readers, in order to expose its shortcomings. In his story he critiques clerical didacticism by emphasizing the indirect nature of poetic discourse. This indirect, psychologically more refined quality, he suggests, provides poetry with greater ethical persuasiveness than mendicant sermonizing.

Filostrato uses the same verb *mordere*: “to shame” (the root of Neifile's *rimordimento*), but now “with a charming story, representing through another.” As did Neifile, Filostrato takes his cue from the story preceding his own. In Emilia's account of the malevolent Franciscan inquisitor, the layman accused by the inquisitor “with an amusing remark ashamed [*aveva morsi*] him and the other mendicant buffoons” [I.6.20]. By contrast Filostrato's tale contains a more indirect rebuke, and its target is not “the vice-filled and corrupt life of the clergy,” which is, he says, “a fixed [i.e. easy] target of wickedness” [I.7.4].⁶⁷

To summarize briefly Filostrato's story: the wretched Bergamino, rejected by Can Grande when visiting his court, gradually consumes his savings until Can Grande asks him the reason for his melancholy. Bergamino responds by telling the episode of the impoverished Primasso, whom the Abbot of Cluny failed to recognize until, upon acknowledging his error, he rewards him with his normal gen-

⁶⁶ I.7.4: “messer Cane della Scala, magnifico signore, d'una subita e disusata avarizia in lui apparita morse con una leggiadra novella, in altro figurando quello che di sé e di lui intendeva di dire. . . .”

⁶⁷ I.6.20: “con ridevol motto lui e gli altri poltroni aveva morsi”; I.7.4: “La viziosa e lorda vita de' cherici, in molte cose quasi di cattività fermo segno. . . .”

erosity. Can Grande immediately sees the point of Bergamino's story and honors him accordingly.

Bergamino, a storyteller within a story, is described by Filostrato as "an incredibly quick-witted and polished speaker." As his way of expressing his poverty to his host Can Grande and his host's own stinginess, Bergamino tells the story of a *third* wordsmith Primasso, "a most worthy man in the linguistic arts and peerless as a great and extemporaneous versifier."⁶⁸ Both Bergamino and his alter ego Primasso are quick-witted (*presto*) with words. Bergamino in turn reflects the subtle mind and sharp rhetoric of his own commemorator, Filostrato, and perhaps the qualities of the model narrator of the *Decameron*.⁶⁹

Bergamino, with his "charming story" [*leggiadra novella*] that touches upon Can Grande's parsimony, may appear to approximate the poet characterized by Boccaccio in his first draft of his *Vita di Dante*: the poet who is engaged in an ethical purpose. "Thus the poets in their works, which we call 'poetry,' sometimes with the fictions of various deities, sometimes with the transmutations of men into various shapes, and sometimes with charming persuasions show the course of things, the effects of virtues and vices, both those things we ought to follow and ought to avoid."⁷⁰ This concept in the *Vita di Dante* of the poetic writer, who edifies his reader with, among other things, "charming [*leggiadre*] persuasions," illuminates how Boccaccio, inspired by Dante, is using poetry and rhetoric in a way that departs from the practice of the mendicant *exempla*-writers, if at times also with an ethical end in view.⁷¹ And yet Bergamino does not tell an allegory with veiled

⁶⁸ I.7.7: "presto parlatore e ornato"; I.7.11: "Primasso fu un gran valente uomo in gramatica e fu oltre a ogni altro grande e presto versificatore. . . ." For an introduction to Hugh Primas, see Fleur Adcock, ed., *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). Burckhardt cited the vagabond poets, the *clerici vagantes*, as potential forerunners of the humanists: *Civilization* 1:179–180, 211 (III.1 and III.4).

⁶⁹ Consider Boccaccio's adoption of the pseudonym Filostrato in his youthful works, his defense of his poetry in the introduction to Day IV, the day ruled by Filostrato, and Filippo Villani's description of Boccaccio as "sermone faceti et qui concionibus delectantur": Filippo Villani, *Liber de civitatis Florentiae famosis civibus*, ed. Gustavo Galetti (Florence: Mazzoni, 1847), 18.

⁷⁰ "Così li poeti nelle loro opere, le quali noi chiamiamo 'poesia,' quando con fizioni di varii iddii, quando con trasmutazioni d'uomini in varie forme, e quando con leggiadre persuasioni, ne mostrano le cagioni delle cose, gli effetti delle virtù e di' vizii, e che fuggire dobbiamo e che seguire. . . ." *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, 53 (I.Red.142).

⁷¹ The connection between Bergamino and Dante is also alluded to by the figure

meanings, unlike the poet who, similar to Boccaccio's conception of Dante, expresses theological ideas in poetic guise.⁷² Bergamino is intent on employing a type of *exemplum*, in order to elicit a response from his host.

Bergamino recounts to Can Grande the poor state of Primasso before the Abbot of Cluny, and tells how Primasso's ragged appearance in the Abbot's court initially disgusts the Abbot: "rapidly there rushed through his mind a wicked thought, one that had never occurred before, and he said to himself: 'Look at whom I give my food!'" But Primasso's persistent loitering at the table, in which he slowly consumes each of his three loaves of bread in succession, forces the Abbot to question the reasons for his disturbed state of mind: "Assuredly stinginess ought not to have assailed me if this man were of small moment: he must possess a certain greatness, he who seems to me a scoundrel, for my mind to be so craven about honoring him."⁷³ Thereupon the Abbot inquires who Primasso is and strives to honor him [I.7.25].

For Bergamino, the parallels between Can Grande and the Abbot are obvious. Can Grande also fails to honor his guest, in a way that is arbitrary and exceptional to his normal generosity. And Bergamino's story has the expected effect, as Can Grande tells him: "Bergamino, you have so aptly shown your damages, your worth and my stinginess and what you desire from me: and truly I had never been assailed by stinginess before now because of you, but I shall chase it with the very club that you yourself have devised."⁷⁴

of Can Grande. More could be said, outside this study, about Boccaccio's reference to Gregory's idea of a two-fold level of preaching for the erudite and the vulgar; *Trattatello*, 52–53 (I.Red.138–140). It would be revealing to compare the use of Gregory by Trecento clergy: Cavalca's translation of the *Dialogues* comes to mind.

⁷² *Trattatello*, 57 (I.Red.154): "Dico che la teologia e la poesia quasi una cosa si possono dire, dove uno medesimo sia il soggetto; anzi dico più: che la teologia niuna altra cosa è che una poesia di Dio. . . . che altro suonano le parole del Salvatore nello evangelio, se non uno sermone da' sensi alieno? il quale parlare noi con più usato vocabolo chiamiamo 'allegoria.'" This entire section of the *vita* reflects in large measure Petrarch's thoughts in *Fam.* X.4; the subject of the *poeta theologus* will be discussed in Chapter 7.

⁷³ I.7.18: "'Vedi a cui io do mangiare il mio!'" I.7.24: "Fermamente avarizia non mi dee avere assalito per uomo di piccolo affare: qualche gran fatto dee esser costui che rebaldo mi pare, poscia che così me s'è rintuzzato l'animo onorarlo."

⁷⁴ I.7.27: "Bergamino, assai pocciamente hai mostrati i danni tuoi, la tua virtù e la mia avarizia e quel che da me disideri: e veramente mai più che ora per te da avarizia assalito non fui, ma io la cacerò con quel bastone che tu medesimo hai divisato."

Notice, here, the power of the *exemplum*! In accord with Cavalca's purpose in his *Lives of the Fathers*, Bergamino's *exemplum* of the Abbot provokes a conversion from meanness to liberality in Can Grande.⁷⁵ It seems that Filostrato employs the concept of the clerical life as a model or indeed mirror for the laity, a concept deeply imbedded in the method of mendicant preaching, in order to explain this change of mind. And as Can Grande would have noticed the *exemplum* told by Bergamino, so too Filostrato's audience.

Yet Filostrato departs from the mendicant method in two significant ways, demonstrating, similar to Neifile, how a traditional concept may be used in order to transform it. As in Neifile's narrative, the reader may discover a sense contrary to the initial appearance, and irony is at work again.

In the first instance, the Abbot of Cluny is hardly the model of clerical piety.⁷⁶ The Abbot is portrayed as nothing less than a secular prince, like Can Grande, and the reasons for his conversion to generosity have more to do with pride than with humility. If he sees the true nature of Primasso underneath his outward clothing, he does so for reasons of bruised self-satisfaction. It is beneath him, he feels, to be offended by someone insignificant; therefore Primasso must be a man of a certain stature. These are feelings of courtly sensitivity, not those sentiments a mendicant preacher would foster. The Abbot's example, the "club" created by Bergamino, is that of *worldly* liberality, which should not shirk from granting the talented the honor they deserve. The Abbot and Can Grande are not asked to be good Samaritans, who treat all, but especially the poor and downtrodden, with instinctive Christian charity. Like Neifile and Emilia, Filostrato emphasizes the degree to which the social elites, especially the clergy, fail to achieve their prescribed ideals. But these ideals, in this case, are more secular than spiritual.

⁷⁵ See the tale of the prostitute's conversion (t. 1, c. 125, p. 203a) or of the married former monks who return to the monastery, repenting their having left "the angelic order" (*l'ordine angelico*, t. 1, c. 137, p. 210a).

⁷⁶ One can read in the life of St. Bernard in the *Leggenda aurea* how Bernard wished to prevent one of his monks from going to Cluny, no doubt because the strict Cistercian knew the decadence of the older monastery. Jacopo da Varagine, *Leggenda aurea*, 3:1017: "Frate Ruberto, monaco di san Bernardo e, secondo la carne, suo parente, ne la sua gioventudine ingannato per male conforto d'alcuni, [si portò a Cluni]. E 'l venerabile santo poi che si fue infinto di non saperlo alcuno temporale, manifestamente ordinoe di richiamarlo per la lettera. . . ."

More significantly, Bergamino refines Filostrato's approach. In contrast to both Filostrato and the preaching friars, Bergamino never attempts to outline a moral intention behind his narrative of Primasso.⁷⁷ It is, as Filostrato says, a "charming story." The attempt to read it as a moral *exemplum* or *speculum* is left to Can Grande. It is therefore the listener or reader, and not the narrator, who finally discerns its edifying import. Here we see a more obvious movement away from the pretence of an objective morality, presented by the clergy, than we first witnessed in Abraam's visit to the Curia. Filostrato emphasizes this by repeating, in his description of Can Grande, the verb *intendere*: "to understand." "Can Grande, being a nobleman of understanding, without any other demonstration understood exactly what Bergamino wanted to say. . . ."⁷⁸ It is important that this understanding comes "without any other demonstration." Can Grande as listener is better able to reflect upon the example, the mirror held up before him, in that it is presented to him obliquely and with wit.⁷⁹

By employing the element of surprise, Bergamino makes his remark more effective. This sudden, spontaneous reply, characteristic of Bergamino's talent, is a critical plot device in the remaining stories of the first day. In the tale following Filostrato's narrative (I.8), Lauretta recounts how Ermino de' Grimaldi, who, in his ostentation, "was not anticipating the response" of Guiglielmo Borsiere. Guiglielmo "with charming words" "skewers" his avarice, in a manner similar to Bergamino. In the next story, I.9, Elissa describes how the lady of Gascony 'punctures' [*trafitto*: the verb is that of I.8's *trafigge*] the weakness of the king of Cyprus with unexpected sarcasm for his failure to avenge her rape.⁸⁰ Just as Filostrato underlined the power of figurative speech at the beginning of his story, Elissa explains the psychological force of this element of surprise, in terms that clearly

⁷⁷ With reference to the *exempla* from Cavalca's *Vite* just cited: t. 1, c. 125: "D'un frate il quale convertì la sirocchia meretrice a penitenzia" and t. 1, c. 137: "Di due frati, li quali vinti dalla tentazione della carne pressono moglie, ma poi si penterono a tornarono a penitenzia."

⁷⁸ I.7.27: "Messer Cane, il quale intendente signore era, senza altra dimostrazione alcuna ottimamente intese ciò che dir volea Bergamino. . . ."

⁷⁹ Wehle refers to the "parabolischen Sprechweise" in the novella, contrasted with the "language of simile" [*Gleichnisssprache*] of the *exempla* (*Novellenerzählen*, 100), though he underplays the necessity of each reader's individual appropriation of the story's import.

⁸⁰ I.8.1: "Guiglielmo Borsiere con leggiadre parole trafigge l'avarizia. . . .; I.9.1: "Il re di Cipri, da una donna di Guascogna trafitto. . . ."

set off the narrators' departure from the mendicant method of instruction: "... it has already happened quite often that the correction, which diverse criticisms and many punishments given to someone have not produced, has been effected many times by a single word, spoken by chance and not with intent aforethought [*ex proposito*]."⁸¹ Chance, spontaneity are crucial elements of the narrator's criticism. While agreeing with the mendicants that the *exemplum* is a powerful rhetorical tool, Boccaccio implies through his narrators that moral questions must be addressed differently if the reader is to engage in genuine, ethical self-reflection. The clerical emphasis on 'criticisms and punishments,' in general the pre-conceived (*ex proposito*) didactic *sententia*, can leave the reader cold and unmoved.

The *Decameron* deepens its difference from the mendicant method of moral instruction by recognizing the audience's readiness, its receptivity to listen and to reflect. Elissa in her prologue to I.9 makes this explicit: "... because, in the awareness that good stories are always helpful, they should be attended to with one's entire mind, no matter who might be the speaker."⁸² Bergamino's message, directed toward changing Can Grande's behavior, is 'individualized,' not only for but also by his listener. His narration allows his listener to 'complete the hermeneutic circle' and to understand the author's intent in the listener's own terms, without being prejudiced by the author's station in life. Can Grande hears the humble Bergamino recount how the Abbot mistreated Primasso and "understood exactly what Bergamino wanted to say. . . ." The individual listener's encounter with these "charming words" that possess, so Lauretta, a "power to change [Ermino's] mind almost completely to the opposite of what it had been up to this point,"⁸³ is far different from the mass response to the friar's sermon on Cepparello and from the universalized lessons of the contemporary preachers, who speak from a position of ecclesiastical authority.

⁸¹ I.9.3: "... spesse volte già addivenne che quello che varie riprensioni e molte pene date a alcuno non hanno in lui adoperare, una parole molte volte, per accidente non che *ex proposito* detta, l'ha operato." Note again the learning ascribed to a female narrator.

⁸² *Loc. cit.*: "... perché, con ciò si cosa che le buone [novelle] sempre possan giovare, con attento animo son da ricogliere, chi che d'esse sia il dicitore." Branca notes her sententiousness here, expressed in the rhythm of the two final hendecasyllables; *Decameron*, I.9.3, n. 2 (1:113).

⁸³ I.8.1: "leggiadre parole"; I.8.17: "[questa parola] ebbe forza di fargli mutare animo quasi tutto in contrario a quello che infino a quella ora aveva avuto. . . ."

Of all the stories told on the first day, Pampinea's tale is the most closely related to the didactic *exemplum* of the mendicant preachers. True to her role as the initiator of the *brigata's* departure and as Queen, Pampinea speaks in solemn tones about the loss and transformation of a type of feminine *virtù*. Women no longer understand a witty remark [*alcun leggiadro [motto]*] or if they do, they are unable to respond. They masquerade their muteness behind the name of *onestà*, pretending to be demure and pure of mind. "Thus that skill that once was in the souls of women of the past has been turned by modern women to the adornment of the body. . . ."⁸⁴

As the *brigata's* appointed and, it would appear, self-appointed mistress, Pampinea uses the theme of clever words, *leggiadri motti*, to address not only the lack of wit among her female contemporaries, but also their incautious use of it; by this address she will bring the day's discussions to an end. She will show through her story how a woman should avoid embarrassing herself when trying to embarrass others. Her tale illustrates Malgherida's reversal at the hands of Alberto of Bologna. Pampinea's magisterial peroration has a tone not unlike that of the mid-Trecento clergy:

In order that you might watch yourselves, and moreover that through you one could not witness [*intendere*] that proverb that is commonly said everywhere, that 'women in all matters always get the worst of it,' I intend this last story of those of today, which falls to me to recount, to lend you instruction ["ve ne renda ammastrate"] so that, as you are different from other women in nobility of mind, you may also show yourselves distinct from others in excellency of manners.⁸⁵

"I wish to render you thereby instructed" is another way of translating Pampinea's "Voglio ve ne renda ammastrate." For the first time the reader encounters, and the *brigata* hears, a narrator employing in her own voice the verb preferred by the Dominican writers for "instruct" or "indoctrinate." Bartolomeo da San Concordio's collection of sayings is entitled the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, and Cavalca

⁸⁴ I.10.4–6, citation I.10.5: "Per ciò che quella virtù che già fu nell'anime delle passate hanno le moderne rivolta in ornamenti del corpo. . . ."

⁸⁵ I.10.8: "Per che, acciò che voi vi sappiate guardare, e oltre a questo acciò che per voi non si possa quello proverbio intendere che comunemente si dice per tutto, cioè che le femine in ogni cosa sempre pigliano il peggio, questa ultima novella di quelle d'oggi, la quale a me tocca di dover dire, voglio ve ne renda ammastrate, acciò che, come per nobiltà d'animo dall'altre divise siete, così ancora per eccellenza di costume separate dall'altre vi dimostriate."

describes Christ's words as an *amaestramento*. In the *Decameron*, the term was mentioned first by Neifile, but with regard to the clerical catechism: Giannotto "engaged the most worthy men to instruct [*ammaestrare*] [Abraam] thoroughly in our faith." It is worth noting that Boccaccio does not use the word *ammaestrare* in relation to his narration of the Plague, for he draws no explicit moral lesson from this event.⁸⁶ Yet now Queen Pampinea, another narrator, will instruct the women through her *exemplum* to be careful and well-advised in how they speak.

Although Pampinea's theme is the same as that of her fellow Florentines, her moral, didactic tone sets her story apart from the others. She moves the discussion therefore to a conceptual level, generalizing about moral behavior. It would be inconsistent with the *Decameron's* treatment of *exempla*, which we have followed, to permit her to maintain her position as moral spokeswoman without clever rebuttal. The *Decameron's* first day thus concludes initially with one narrator assuming, as much as possible, the posture of preacher, who presents both the lesson and *exemplum*, and then with the work's ironic response to her posturing.

Pampinea criticizes women who pretend to protect their *onestà* in order to conceal their dullness. By so doing she also calls into question the reasoning she had advanced earlier for leaving the city when the women assembled in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella: that they would preserve their *onestà*, if they fled the urban moral disease.⁸⁷ She herself is conscious about how her disparagement of female vanity and loss of wit reflects on her own comportment: "I myself am embarrassed to say it, because I cannot say anything against other women that I do not say against myself." But there are deeper problems in her prologue. She begins by saying that "charming words [*leggiadri moti*] . . . being succinct, are much better suited for ladies than for men, insofar as one blames ladies more than men for talking much and at length, when this can be

⁸⁶ I.2.29: "... appresso a gran valenti uomini il fece compiutamente ammaestrare nella nostra fede. . . ." We may recall the contrast to Boccaccio's more ecclesiastically minded counterpart, Matteo Villani: "li uomini meno comprendono il divino giudicio . . . se per memoria di simiglianti casi ne' tempi passati non hanno alcuno amaestramento. . . ." *Cronica*, 4 (Pref.17-21).

⁸⁷ Intro.53-72, esp. 65: "... io giudicherei ottimamente fatto che noi, sì come noi siamo, . . . di questa terra uscissimo, e fuggendo come la morte i disonesti essempli degli altri onestamente a' nostri luoghi in contado. . . ."

avoided.”⁸⁸ Perhaps she feels her prologue is necessary, but it is anything but concise, and her style of discourse does not harmonize well with its content.

The appearance of contradiction is heightened by her shift of focus. From impugning women for their loss of words, she turns to advise them on the proper timing of speech, in effect to warn them against speaking, be it incautiously or too often. Her story turns on the failed attempt by Malgherida dei Ghisolieri to rebuke a distinguished *maestro*: women should be careful not to transgress their social position before authority. Her opening account of women’s muteness and physical vanity has little to do with the final moral of their story and in fact conflicts with it.⁸⁹

It is likely, given the theme of the other novelle of Day I, that Boccaccio is mocking, through Pampinea’s pose of moral superiority, both the loquacity of clerical preachers and the inherent problem in their sermonizing. Their sermons are not merely too verbose. They also lack subjectivity, that introspective awareness of the relation between the speaker and his utterance. We have seen how Petrarch, in his treatise *On Religious Leisure*, criticizes preachers for this failing, for being “talkative and deaf at the same time.” Although Pampinea attempts to correct the subversive nature of the earlier stories, her effort will likely fail to impress her audience. She strives to close the day’s story-telling on a note of moral rebuke and edification. But, as it does for Malgherida, the effort backfires and leads the reader to ask uncomfortable questions about her personality and position. It is precisely these questions that the previous stories, in their challenges to social authority, have encouraged the reader to raise. Pampinea, viewing the theme of the day as that of clever speech, will conclude it as she deems morally fit, yet she also evokes a perception of this theme’s elusiveness and inconclusiveness, its resistance to authoritative definition. As we have noted, in Boccaccio’s hands an *exemplum* or *speculum* will not necessarily confirm the preacher’s pre-conceived moral expectation, and present a simple, unambiguous

⁸⁸ I.10.4, 6: “il leggiadri motti . . . , per ciò che brevi sono, molto meglio alle donne stanno che agli uomini, in quanto più alle donne che agli uomini il molto parlare e lungo, quando senza esso si possa far, si disdice. . . . Io mi vergogno di dirlo, per ciò che contro all’altre non posso dire che io contro a me non dica. . . .”

⁸⁹ See Guisepppe Velli’s remarks on the inconsistency of her comments on fortune in VI.2: “Seneca nel ‘Decameron’”, 321–323.

meaning. The attempt of Cavalca, Passavanti and other friars to promote piety through saintly examples elicits, among the *Decameron's brigata* and readers, a sceptical scrutiny.

It is not Pampinea at day's end who has the final word. First Dioneo asks the next day's Queen, Filomena, for "a gift of special grace": may he break the pre-established procedure ("l'ordine data da voi") and not only tell a story on any topic, but also tell the last one of every day? Henceforth each day's final story will no longer be given to the King or Queen, but to arguably the most reckless and salacious narrator of the *brigata*.⁹⁰ Could not this be a reaction against Pampinea's moralizing?

The first day's ultimate statement belongs to Emilia, who in her tale in I.6, as Filostrato noted, took the most direct aim at clerical hypocrisy. Almost as recompense for its simplicity, she now sings a ballad that contains the most puzzling lines of the day, perhaps of the entire ten. For the *Decameron* narrator records: "This little ballad coming to an end, in which all had cheerfully joined the refrain, even as some greatly pondered its words . . . , it pleased the Queen to end the first day."⁹¹ What kind of coda is this, that ends the day with a puzzle?

The reader does not know what the thoughtful chorus is thinking, despite the scholarly attempts to determine the meaning of Emilia's ballad. There are clues to this meaning contained in her choice of words, clues we may best decipher in context of the Trecento understanding of *exemplum* and *speculum*. Emilia sings:

I am so pleased by my beauty
 that of another love I shall never
 care nor believe to take pleasure.
 I see in this beauty, each time I look at myself in the mirror [or
 self-reflect],
 that good that contents the intellect:
 neither new accident nor old thought
 can deprive me of such delight.
 What other object so pleasing
 could I ever see
 that would place new delight in my heart?

⁹⁰ I.Concl.12: "... dico io sommamente esser piacevole e commendabile l'ordine dato da voi. Ma di spzial grazia vi chiegio un dono. . . ."

⁹¹ "Questa ballatella finita, alla qual tutti lietamente avean riposto, ancora che alcuni molto alle parole di quella pensar facesse . . . piacque alla reina di dar fine alla prima giornata." I.Concl.22.

This good does not flee whenever I desire
to gaze upon it to my consolation:
indeed it meets my pleasure
with such sweet feeling, that no mortal
could ever give a sermon
nor glean an understanding
who has not burned with such delight.

And I, who burn with every hour
I more firmly fix my eyes on it,
give myself wholly to it, wholly yield myself,
already tasting that which it has promised me:
and I hope for greater joy later on,
a joy so made that never
will one feel here a similar delight.⁹²

We hear Emilia using the language of the schoolmen, as did Neifile earlier: “that good that contents the intellect;” “new accident.” This language has led commentators to maintain that she is meditating upon God or Wisdom.⁹³ Antonio Gagliardi views her as the Aristotelian “prime substance,” who speaks to God as her good (*bonum*).⁹⁴ Rinaldina Russell argues that Emilia is recalling Dante’s *l’anima filosofante*, the philosophizing soul, who “not only contemplates truth itself, but also contemplates its own contemplation and the beauty of this. . . .”

⁹² I.Concl.18–21: “Io son sí vaga della mia bellezza, / che d’altro amor già mai / non curerò né credo aver vaghezza. / Io veggio in quella, ognora ch’io mi specchio, / quel ben che fa contento lo ‘ntelletto: / né accidente nuovo o pensier vecchio / mi può privar di sí caro diletto. / Qual altro dunque piacevole oggetto/ potrei veder giammai, / che mi mettesse in cuor nuova vaghezza? / Non fugge questo ben, qualor disio / di rimirarlo in mia consolazione; / anzi si fa incontro al piacer mio / tanto soave a sentir, che sermone / dir nol poria, ne prendere intenzione / d’alcun mortal giammai, / che non ardesse di cotal vaghezza. / E io, che ciascun’ora più m’accendo, / quanto più fiso gli occhi tengo in esso, / tutta mi dono a lui, tutta mi rendo, / già di ciò ch’el m’ha promesso, / e maggior gioia spero più da presso / sì fatta, che giammai / simil non si senti qui di vaghezza.”

⁹³ Cf. Branca’s note 8 to I.Concl.21 (1:126). Branca himself, in his *Boccaccio medievale*, 274–275, sees evidence here of a possible nostalgia for the vanished, more deeply spiritual generation of Dante, for the *poesia stilnovelistica* and *canto popolare*. This nostalgia, however, is not recorded in the reaction of her listeners. As much as Emilia’s song may look back to past conventions of artistic expression, it also transforms them—hence implicitly criticizing them—through its audacious unapologetic self-absorption.

⁹⁴ *Giovanni Boccaccio*, 204–209. In Gagliardi’s view: “La teologia di Boccaccio è quella de Aristotele de dei filosofi, il suo Deo è il principio della natura che niente ha in comune con il Deo cristiano” (209).

According to this standpoint, Boccaccio is closing the first day with a sublime reference to both metaphysical and lyrical traditions.⁹⁵

While these poetic or metaphysical references may seem plausible, one must ask: with what *tone* are they being treated? The interpretations offered by commentators fail to account for the possibility of an ironic tone toward cultural or religious tradition, largely because these views do not attribute distinct, psychological personalities to the members of the *brigata*.⁹⁶ As we have seen throughout the first day, it is their individuality vis-à-vis the reader that underlies the *Decameron's* subjective mode of communication, of which irony is a critical component. The idea that Emilia simply contemplates God or Truth is difficult to reconcile with the Emilia we hear speaking either earlier or afterwards. Her independence of character is established in her story of the inquisitor in I.6, which attacks the clergy's control over orthodoxy. One might claim that she is posing a mystical vision using scholastic concepts, akin to Meister Eckhart. But in contrast to Eckhart or other mystics, she makes us aware of her posing and posturing.

Given Emilia's typically iconoclastic way of speaking, even when compared to her companions, could she not be using the scholastic, clerical language to suggest something more ambiguous or even heterodox? "I see in this [my] beauty, each time I look at myself in the mirror (self-reflect) ["io mi specchio"], that good that contents the intellect." The Trecento reader could recall two associations: first Pampinea's recent indictment of women's pride in their appearances, and then the understanding of holy lives as *specula*, as proclaimed by Cavalca and Dini. In accord with these associations, Emilia's

⁹⁵ *Generi poetici medioevali: modelli e funzioni letterarie* (Naples: Società editrice napoletana, 1982) 87–89. See *Convivio*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Milan: Rizzoli, 1993), 225 (IV.ii.18): "... l'anima filosofante non solamente contempla essa veritate, ma ancora contempla lo suo contemplare medesimo e la bellezza di quello."

⁹⁶ See Russell's denial of these narrative personalities: "... essi [the storytellers] sono perciò da intendere solo come 'tipi' e non come personaggi psicologicamente individualizzati" (88). For the vital importance of tone in understanding a literary work, see I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World 1929), 174–175: "Furthermore, the speaker has ordinarily *an attitude toward his listener*. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate *recognition of his relation to them*. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands toward those he is addressing. Again the exceptional case of dissimulation, or instances in which the speaker unwittingly reveals an attitude he is not consciously desirous of expressing, comes to mind." Italics by Richards.

readers would interpret her *mi specchio* in both a literal as well as a figurative sense. The mirror may reflect a physical or a mental image. Her pre-occupation with her physical self suggests vanity and concern for temporal beauty; yet on another level the mirror also connotes the quest for supersensible truth.⁹⁷ Unlike contemporary moral writers, Emilia sings with such ambiguity as to leave the interpretation inconclusive. And furthermore she responds to both senses of the mirror in a way that undercuts the moral authorities of her day.

If we view Emilia as reacting to Pampinea's charge that her contemporaries take too much pride in their physical display, she has implicitly rejected the Queen's lesson, her *ammaestramento*. "I am so pleased by my beauty," she sings. Emilia sings of her beauty's pleasure "with such sweet feeling, that no mortal / could ever give a sermon / nor glean an understanding / who has not burned with such delight."⁹⁸

Pampinea had criticized not only women's vanity, but also their failure either to understand wit or to speak wittily. But Emilia responds to her in a very clever way. Emilia's song suggests that her pleasure can neither be expressed nor understood by anyone who lacks such delight in this pleasure—including the Queen! Pampinea, she implies, has not experienced such delight, and therefore moralizes about it *a priori*. Through her song Emilia trumps the Queen in both forms of feminine *virtù*: she celebrates the power of both physical and verbal charm, contradicting the Queen's assertion that women cultivate their appearance at the cost of their wit. Possessing physical splendor need not tie the tongue nor deplete the mind; a woman may yet have the grace of both body and intellect. In fact the reader is asked to attribute both qualities to Neifile and other ladies of the *brigata*. Emilia's ballad cleverly raises the question: could not Pampinea and other, clerical moralists be practicing their sermons while ignoring the graces not merely of the body but indeed of language, the 'brief, charming words'?

⁹⁷ With regard to Boccaccio's use of ambiguous metaphors for the relation between the profane and the sacred, cf. Almansi's comments of III.10, the story of Rustico and Alibech, where he sees "the precise parallelism set up between erotic ritual and religious ceremony": *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the Decameron* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1975), 84; cited by Delcorno, "Modelli agiografici," 358.

⁹⁸ I.Concl.20: "... tanto soave a sentir, che sermone / dir nol poria né prendere intenzione / d'alcun mortal già mai, / che non ardesse di cotal vaghezza."

The central point of Emilia's poetic rebuttal, based on this first reading, is the need for a common emotional experience, in her case a delight in the pleasure of beauty ("ardesse di cotal vaghezza"), in order to understand and speak about this experience with authority. Authentic communication between one who talks and one who listens comes through partaking in analogous, if not the same, experiences.⁹⁹ Playing upon association between protagonist and audience as observers of *exempla*, Emilia's point now brings more fully to light that which at first glance in these earlier stories was less obvious. Can Grande understood Bergamino's story because, by "representing through another," he could recognize the Abbot's emotions as his own. Abraam becomes a significant character for the lay *brigata*; with his native intelligence he discerns the Holy Spirit at work, despite the obvious clerical venality.

But what does Emilia's argument imply about the moral effectiveness of the mendicant *exempla*, if they fail to account for the audience's emotional lives, their interests and desires? Let us consider her use of *speculum* more specifically in relation to the preaching friars.

"Each time I self-reflect" ["ognora ch'io mi specchio"]. Only Emilia in the *Decameron* uses the word *specchio*, here and in her story of the sixth day, which we shall examine shortly. Her song's use of this term exposes an inadequacy in the *exemplum*-tradition, especially in its rhetorical power, a power more than verbal in "mov[ing] people to good works." Cavalca had declared the clergy "mirrors through which the laity must engage in self-reflection and in the ministers' saintly lives acknowledge their own uncleanness and their flaws and thereby correct them." Dini called his brethren the *specula mundorum*, "the mirrors of the worldly." Passavanti entitled his vernacular work a "mirror" of true penitence, for it showed "that which one ought to do and which one ought to observe in others."¹⁰⁰ But in Emilia's mirroring she sees "that good that contents the intellect."

⁹⁹ Cf. Proem.2: "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti: e come che a ciascuna persona stea bene, a coloro è massimamente richesto li quali già hanno di conforto avuto mestiere e hannol trovato in alcuni. . . ."

¹⁰⁰ *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 7: "E imperò che in questo libro si dimostra quello che si richiede di fare e quello di che altri si dee guardare acciò che si faccia vera penitenza, convenevolmente e ragionevolmente s'appella Specchio della vera penitenza."

Emilia's ballad demonstrates how the language of the clerical preachers may confirm their self-satisfaction rather than induce self-criticism. Their *speculum* may do more to comfort them than to challenge their ways of thinking. This, Boccaccio suggests, is an inherent flaw of the clerical mirror. Insofar as the clergy assumes its own way of life as the ideal, it fails to notice its own detachment from the lives of the laity. The clerical estate does not succeed in escaping, in fact it does not aim to escape, its preconceived frame of reference in matters of morality. Emilia's song proclaims her self-absorption or willful narcissism; she appears isolated and independent from the company of the *brigata*. Her song thus parodies how the clerical *specula* presupposes this distance between cleric and layman in matters of morality; and her ballad implicitly criticizes the clerical arrogance toward the laity's way of life. For do not the Fathers and friars advocate that one withdraw from the world of the laity and pursue a sanctified solitude in the hermitage? Does not Cavalca describe the life of the laity in the world, the *secolo*, as more arduous and perilous than the religious life?¹⁰¹ The research of Benvenuti Papi has shown the appeal of religious seclusion to Trecento Florentine women.¹⁰² But Emilia shows us a different reaction to the mendicant ideals. First in her story of I.6 and now more obliquely in her song, she expresses how the privileges of the clergy could elicit not only the clergy's pride and hypocrisy, but also the laity's aversion.

Emilia's use of the *speculum* establishes both a psychological and methodological critique of the clergy's use of this symbol. In the first instance, the clergy's focus on the mirror may produce only static, isolating self-absorption. Yet this observation leads to the more important methodological or rhetorical point, in which Boccaccio's break from the mendicants more clearly emerges. Emilia's song makes her companions think about its meaning. Though she sounds self-

¹⁰¹ E.g., *Vite de' santi Padri*, 103 (189b–190a); 107 (192b); 127 (210a). See also Cavalca's *Lo libro della patientia / La medicina del cuore* (*Treatise on Suffering; or The Medicine of the Heart*), Vaticana latina inc. 9999, f. 17v, lines 11–20 (ch. 5): “La secunda consideratione che adiuta la patientia sie considerare le fatigue et le pene delli huomini mundani et li pericoli per volere guadagnare questi beni terreni. Et in verita se volemo sempre cio penzare ben vederemo che mauire disascio [maiore disagio] abstinentie e viglie fatigue et pericoli anno et pateno limarinari li soldati et altre molte ienti [gente] per lo mundo che noi per dio.”

¹⁰² See her “*In castro poenitentiae*”: *Santità e società femminile nell' Italia medievale* (Rome: Herder, 1990), 216–233; 601–623.

contained, she provokes her audience to evaluate her verses. Because of their ambiguity and range of meaning, her ballad counters Pampinea and more generally the social and spiritual authority assumed by the clergy. Not only does the clergy fail to follow its own *exemplum* or *speculum*: although that is the concern of Cavalca, Boccaccio's Filostrato calls it, in his critique of her story of I.6, an "easy target" [I.7.4]. Boccaccio implies that the *speculum*'s greater flaw, shown most clearly by the mendicant sermonizing, is its failure to recognize the readiness of the lay reader to listen and interpret its significance for himself.

Emilia's ballad of the mirror of beauty resonates in her story of Day VI. As noted by commentators, the sixth day appears in some respects a reiteration of the first: it begins the second half of the *Decameron*'s story-telling and picks up on the theme of the charming word or witty reply.¹⁰³ In musical terms, it forms a second movement that offers variants on an earlier motif.¹⁰⁴ Emilia's story of this sixth day is remarkable in how it uses this concept of the *speculum* for the second and final time in the *Decameron*.

Emilia tells the episode of Cesca and her uncle Fresco. Cesca, a difficult, conceited child, continually complains about other people. Her uncle, finally exasperated, tells her to avoid looking at herself if she wants to keep bothersome faces out of sight.

Emilia's tale centers around the use of the mirror. "Fresco urges his niece not to look at herself in the mirror [or self-reflect; "non si specchi"] if annoying people, as she has claimed, have become irritating to look at" [VI.8.1]. Branca, in his notes on the first and last sentences of the narrative, remarks on the mirror as an "emblem of truth" in medieval symbolism, and, alternately, as a symbol of vanity as the mirror of Eros.¹⁰⁵ We have already encountered both significations in Emilia's song of Day I. Her story says still more on the relation between the two meanings of *speculum*, of external and inner self-reflection, a relation whose nature is best discerned if one

¹⁰³ See Branca, V.Concl.3, n. 4 (2:706).

¹⁰⁴ Panfilo commenced the story-telling with Cepparello's fraud and his naive mendicant confessor; Dioneo in VI.10 introduces Friar Cipolla, a second preacher who also moves his audience with assertions about saints, although—this time—the preacher knows his claims are false. There is an association of the names Cepparello—Ciappelletto—Cipolla, confirmed by the witty symbolism of these layers in the word *cipolla* (onion).

¹⁰⁵ VI.8.1: "Fresco conforta la nepote che non si specchi, se gli spiacevoli, come diceva, l'erano a veder noiosi." See VI.8.1, n. 1 (2:750); VI.8.10, n. 5 (2:756).

reads Emilia's story in context with her verses and thus in the web of connotations linking *speculum* with the *exemplum* or moral narrative.

The need for this context becomes apparent through the descriptions of Emilia herself. For Emilia, when called upon by Elissa to tell her story, "not otherwise than if she had aroused herself from sleep, began with a sigh". This impression of withdrawn self-absorption, first presented in her *canzone*, is strengthened by her opening words: "Fair [*vaghe*] young ladies, since a deep thought has kept me far from here a long time. . . ." ¹⁰⁶ It is uncertain whether she has even heard the previous stories, and the adjective *vaghe* recalls her song's refrain of her own pleasure [*vaghezza*]. As we saw in Neifile's story of Abraam, the narrator's personality comes into play, and Emilia's personality is more complex than Neifile's: detached, subtle, more self-involved and moodier. Her puzzling, ambiguous self-confession in her song makes any objective presentation, and consequently any straight-forward reading, impossible. So far has Emilia moved from the mendicant manner of using *exempla* and *specula*, even while she plays upon the idea of the *speculum* as an "emblem of truth"!

Emilia in fact alludes to her own apparent self-involvement by describing the difficult young Cesca as one who also sighs to express her inner troubles: "fully fretting she plopped herself down at his [Fresco's] side, and did nothing but sigh. . . ." The identification between a story's narrator and protagonist, first made evident in Filostrato's novella of Bergamino, is now broadened by Emilia in her association of herself with the one *receiving* the rebuke. Her uncle Fresco tells the sighing girl: "if annoying people annoy you as much as you say, if you wish to live a cheerful life, never look at yourself in a mirror [reflect upon yourself; 'non ti specchiare']. . . ." Emilia focuses not only on the uncle's "amusing remark," but equally on "whether she [Cesca] was in a state to understand it". For Cesca, it seems, is no Can Grande: "she said that she wished to look at herself in the mirror ['si voleva specchiar'] just like other women". ¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ VI.8.3: ". . . la quale, non altramenti che se da dormir si levasse, soffiando incominciò"; VI.8.4: "—Vaghe giovani, per ciò che un lungo pensiero molto di qui m'ha tenuta gran pezza lontana . . ."

¹⁰⁷ VI.8.7: ". . . tutta piena di smancerie postaglisi presso a sedere, altro non faceva che soffiare. . . ."; VI.8.9: "'Figliuola, se così ti dispiacion gli spiacevoli, come tu di', se tu vuoi viver lieta non ti specchiar giammai"; VI.8.4: ". . . se ella da tanto stata fosse che inteso l'avesse"; VI.8.10: ". . . disse che ella si voleva specchiar come l'altre."

The *speculum* in Emilia's story links the tale with those told on Day I. Its very difference from these opening stories in fact reinforces their ironic treatment of the mendicant *exemplum*. Emilia's tale of Fresco and Cesca is the only one in the *Decameron* which displays the inefficacy of verbal wit, the *buon motto*. Fresco's clever comment fails to spark genuine self-awareness in his niece. His remark is witty and true, but Cesca misses its pun and its ethical point, choosing only to hear its literal, physical meaning. She lacks the ability to perceive associative or poetic nuance, whereby a remark may be read "by representing something through another." She is so pleased with herself, so absorbed in her own image, that the figurative, reflected meanings do not touch her.

Cesca, being the one unable to read reflected meanings, again portrays a flaw in the tradition of the clerical *speculum* we witnessed earlier. Her uncle's remark is certainly a greater "club" than the one Bergamino presented to Can Grande, and falls just shy of being blunt. But Cesca's self-absorption solidifies her mental obtuseness. How are the clergy to reach people such as her through the *exemplum*, especially when their preaching lacks the avuncular wit and timing of Fresco?

Emilia's story of Cesca suggests a second type of Trecento audience, opposite to the intelligent reader portrayed by Can Grande. She seems to be elaborating on her *specchio*-song as well and delighting in presenting puzzles to her listeners. The ending of her story in Day VI, like her little ballad, is also unexpected and seems to catch the *brigata* by surprise. "The Queen, sensing that Emilia had finished off her story and that no other remained to speak except she . . ." are the opening lines to the following tale.¹⁰⁸ As does her song, Emilia's story ends inconclusively, missing the ultimate edifying note expressed by the *exemplum*-tradition and also, with their indirect, ironic manner, the other stories from the first and sixth days.

Yet the inconclusiveness has a thematic purpose in the *Decameron*. Emilia's narrative of Day VI, similar to those of her companions, contains meanings that interweave within a single story, among stories, and between the storytelling and the frame-story of the work, provided the reader attends to them. The *Decameron* is characterized

¹⁰⁸ VI.9.2: "Sentendo la reina che Emilia della sua novella s'era diliberata e che a altro non restava dir che a lei . . ."

by the subtle references among narrators, between narrator and protagonist, and between protagonist and audience that undermine the simpler, more static cosmos of the medieval *exemplum*. Because of this undulating weave of associations the work engages a sharp sense of irony toward the mendicant method of preaching. It transforms the moral lessons, normally announced by the clergy, through a mode of communication, practiced by secular narrators, that is more attentive to the critical moment. The ethical substance is not pre-conceived but *presto parlato*, spontaneous, evoked by the atmosphere of discussion. The planned use of wit by Pampinea's lady in I.10 is ingeniously turned against her.

Emilia's Cesca and her mirror underscore the philosophical significance of Boccaccio's use of the *exemplum*. According to the *Decameron's brigata*, the effect of the verbal picture, the *exemplum*, depends decisively on the receptivity of the reader. The mendicant custom of pre-determining the moral lesson of the story only serves to raise scepticism among many in the audience, leading them to question the source of clerical authority.¹⁰⁹ Narrow moral messages preached through the *exempla* carry little force in the minds of those who now need to develop their own personalized associations between their real lives and the ideal *vita*. This conception forms one of Petrarch's axioms even in his didactic *On the Life of Solitude*: one must pursue one's path in life in harmony with one's character.¹¹⁰ The ten young story-tellers of the *Decameron*, in leaving the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella and the diseased city, must create

¹⁰⁹ As we see in the friars' sermons told by Panfilo (I.1) and Dioneo (VI.10).

¹¹⁰ See *De vita* 1.IV.4 (84–85), with criticism directed against an absolute, universal standard of living: "In omni quidem ordiende mutandaque vite consilio illud imprimis ante oculos habendum, ut non concupiscentia inani, sed natura duce freti vitam teneamus, non que speciosissima videbitur, sed que aptissima nobis erit. Ubi maxime rectum ac severum sui ipsius extimatorem ac censorem exigo, ne oculorum aut aurium voluptate deceptus aberret. Quod quibusdam accidisse scio, qui, dum mirantur ailio, immemores sui atque aliena tenentes ridendi materiam populo prebuerunt. Hoc unum sumptum a philosophis consilium est michi, secundum quod vel solitarium vel urbanum vitam sive aliam quamlibet nature moribusque suis comparans norit quisque, quid suum sit." Also 1.III.18–19 (80): "At ne diutius me consideratione non mea implicem, de se illi, nos de nobis libret unusquisque, qui preferat; impossibile est enim, etsi unum omnes finem ultimum intendamus, ut unam omnibus vite viam expediat sequi. Qua in re cuique acriter cogitandum erit, qualem eum natura, qualem ipse se fecerit."

their own ethic. The medieval Church taught the Florentines how to conceive a sense of symbolic order in religion and society. Now it must stand aside as the urban laity, trained to perceive and interpret the world through symbols, conceives its cosmos in its own terms, with a heightened awareness of ambiguity, and of human potential and pretension.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARADOX OF EXPERIENCE AND MORAL AUTHORITY IN PETRARCH'S WRITINGS

We have seen how the *Decameron* re-assesses the relation between individual experience and religious and cultural authority. Boccaccio's narrative of the Plague questions the tradition of salvation history. The ten storytellers review sceptically the conventions of the *exemplum*. The storytellers themselves strive to maintain order, taking care to select rulers among themselves who oversee the activities of each day of exile from Florence, activities that include time for meditation and worship on the Sabbath. Even so this order is fragile and easily upset by rivalries within the *brigata* and by external disruption.¹

The *Decameron* treats the relation between experience and authority in a way that aligns the work with Petrarch's humanism, by presenting to the reader the hermeneutical problem posed by the various perspectives of the ten narrators. The narrators shift to the reader the weight of understanding Boccaccio's message. As a poet, Boccaccio stands at an ironic distance from his work, and takes care not to speak with an authoritative voice. He instead presents his readers with the task of discerning his meaning indirectly, through the different narrative guises. This discernment requires the reader's own judgment and experience to come into play, in order to complete the hermeneutic circle. Boccaccio appeals in the *Decameron* to the reader's ability to discriminate among his narrators' opinions. He sharpens the subjectivity of narrator and reader by having his stories told over an apparent stretch of time, two weeks, which allows for modulation of understanding and response from one day to the next.

These factors, the subjective and the temporal or historical, characterize the Trecento humanists' understanding of the relation between experience and authority, and distinguish their understanding from

¹ See the argument between the servants Licisca and Tandaro at the beginning of Day VI (Intro.5–16), and Barolini's comments on Licisca's influence on the storytelling in "Le parole son femmine e i fatti sono maschi": Toward a Sexual Poetics of the *Decameron* (*Decameron* II 10)" in *Studi sul Boccaccio* 21 (1993): 177.

the Church's use of authority at this time. Their appreciation of the individual's immersion in the finite, the temporal, elicited and was sustained by an irony toward the earnest doctrines of the Church. Seeing all individuals, including themselves, to be immersed in the finite and the temporal, they oriented their sensibility toward one's emotional response to this immersion, especially toward the new anxieties and feeling of freedom. We shall discuss the fuller implications of this immersion in the next chapter. For now it bears repeating that their poetic sensitivity to the flow of existence, a sensitivity that recognized the reality of an individual's existing in a specific, historical moment, sharpened their ironic view of ecclesiastical tradition, especially as this tradition denigrated this sensitivity. Having been spurred by the mendicants, their irony extended to religious and cultural authority in general, including that of the ancients.

Petrarch's awareness of the subjective, temporal place of author, reader and authority is enhanced by the sense of historical change. Thus he struggled to discover the truth among historical phenomena. In his letter to the Dominican Giovanni Colonna he states "I do not love schools of thought, but the truth," and in another letter he asks his correspondent why authorities themselves are important: "If you approve of the quotation I gave, why do you seek the author? Everything true, as Augustine says, is true by its foundation in truth. I am the one saying these things. Or perhaps you deny the truth of the statement? Experience speaks here which is not accustomed to lying; truth speaks which is not able to lie."² And in *On the Life of Solitude* [*De vita solitaria*], a work written for the Bishop of Cavaillon and populated by examples of pious hermits, Petrarch qualifies any external authority, including his own, maintaining that the force of one's own experience would move one to realize that solitude is necessary not only for art, but also for virtue: "... what trouble is there for an argument when it enters the ears of a person who, in order to

² *Fam.* VI.2.1: "... non etenim sectas amo, sed verum"; III.15.1: "... si dictum probas, quid queris auctorem? Omne verum, ut ait Augustinus, a veritate verum est. Ego hec loquor. An forte tu negas? Loquitur experientia que mentiri non solet; loquitur veritas que mentiri non potest." Both letters are of uncertain date: cf. Ernest Wilkins, *Petrarch's Correspondence*, 59 (for VI.2) and Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, 1–55, on the re-writing of *Fam.* I–IV. See also the references to personal experience in *De otio religioso* 55.30–56.5 and 15.3–6. The last passage refers to Petrarch's own lack of authority in composing the treatise.

trust what he hears, applies neither the representation of an *exemplum*, nor the weight of an authority, nor a point of reason, but only consults the testimony of his own experience and says silently, ‘it is so?’³

Here experience is set above the prestige of authority in the discerning of truth. Yet characteristically, and ironically, Petrarch feels the need in the letters to cite the authority of Augustine. Augustine’s life and thought are central to Petrarch’s own self-understanding. Petrarch on more than one occasion identifies with Augustine’s history, calling him a personal *exemplum* in the *Familiares*, also carrying his *Confessions* to the top of Mt. Ventoux.⁴ In the *Secretum* the figure of Veritas, presiding over the conversation, brings forth Augustinus as an interlocutor, because, she says, he has experienced sufferings similar to those of Franciscus [Proem. 3.3].⁵ But in the *Secretum* Augustine’s conversion becomes more a wistful dream, seen as a stable place on *terrafirma* by a Franciscus still at sea with his conflicting emotions.

³ Revising Jacob Zeitlin’s translation, *The Life of Solitude*, 106; *De vita solitaria* 1.I.3 (40): “. . . quid difficile habet oratio in illius aures ventura, qui, quod audit, secum conferens non exempli imaginem, non auctoritatis pondus, non rationis aculeum, ut credat, nichil denique nisi sui ipsius testimonium querit et tacitus dicit: ‘Ita est?’” See also 1.VII.13 (130): “Hactenus ea lege disserui, quid sentirem, ut nullam ingenii legem imposuisse me sentiant, qui hec legent, siquis adeo abundans otio erit, ut otium nostrum legat. Singula igitur examinent de veritate rerum, non tam michi vel aliis quam experientie credituri.” In Zeitlin’s translation (159): “Thus far I have set forth my opinion with the idea that none who read it, if indeed there be any so rich in leisure as to read the product of my leisure, should think that I have been establishing a rule for their minds. Let them rather examine the truth of the matter in detail and not feel bound to take me or any one else on faith but only trust the evidence of their own experience.” See also 1.IV.12 (93): “Nulla maior quam iudicii libertas: hanc ita michi vendico, ut aliis non negem”; and 1.VI.12 (118). The nature of Petrarch’s experience, he claims, forms the matrix and motive of the work’s composition: “In hoc autem tractatu magna ex parte solius experientie ducatum habui nec alium ducem querens nec oblatum admissurus liberiore quidem gressu. . . .” 1.I.4 (40). In *Fam.* XXII.10.7 Petrarch discusses how “victrix experientia atque oculis se se infundens fulgida veritas” have proven the worth of the Latin Fathers, Paul and David; cited by Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l’Humanisme*, (Paris: H. Champion, 1907) 2:190. See Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization*, 74–76, on Petrarch’s moral “interiority,” emphasizing his critique of “the extrinsic and repetitive genre of the florilegia and collections of moralities and examples.”

⁴ See *Fam.* VI.4.13–14, IV.1. A seminal study of Petrarch’s relation to Augustine is Pierre Courcelle’s “Pétrarque entre Saint Augustin et les Augustins du XIV^e Siècle,” *Studi Petrarqueschi* 7 (1961): 51–71.

⁵ This relation between Veritas and Augustinus is a reversal, for reasons of drama, of those at the close of *De otio religioso*. Here Petrarch states that Augustine “first guided me to the love of Truth” (*On Religious Leisure*, 146; 104.11: “Ille me primum ad amorem veri crexit. . .”).

Once again we encounter, as a centripetal force, the feeling of exile or separation as a pre-condition for participating in what Petrarch called the “conversation with honorable men” [*clarorum virorum conversatio*].⁶ Boccaccio for his part uses the exiles from Florence to narrate how moral instruction is conveyed indirectly, in a way that engages the reader’s own evaluation. These humanists believed that this sense of exile not only tested one’s virtue, thereby building the basis of genuine friendship, but also granted friends and authorities their proper respect; the true perspective toward one’s guides in life was formed in an awareness of historical difference.

As Petrarch’s personal statement, the *Secretum*, makes clear, this feeling of detachment from one’s authorities did not diminish their importance: one is removed from, yet bound to, these guides and sages. Church Fathers and classical writers were for Petrarch spiritual interlocutors, whom he addressed through the screens of text and time. It is useful to relate Petrarch’s reflections in the *Secretum* and elsewhere to the the confessional practice of the contemporary Church.⁷ The authorities he chooses as his spiritual guides may be compared to father confessors; they help him compose ethical meaning out of the phenomena of his life history. Like an ideal priest, Augustine tells Franciscus that “whatever you think or do is before my eyes.”⁸

Therefore Petrarch, along with Boccaccio, may be responding to the ecclesiastical teachings of confession in Trecento Italy. In different ways, both humanists point out certain flaws in these teachings, especially concerning the consistency of clerical counsel. While Boccaccio frames his personality by the voices of his ten narrators, who treat with irony the Church’s confessional practice, Petrarch speaks through his own persona, and his irony is also directed toward himself, stemming from his struggle for spiritual progress.

Among the Tuscan mendicants, Jacopo Passavanti composed his *Mirror of True Penitence* with the art of confession as its central theme.⁹

⁶ *Fam.* IV.2.6, placed in conjunction with *nobilium ingeniorum familiaritas*.

⁷ Nohac (*Pétrarque et l’Humanisme*, 2:194) has called the *Secretum* “la plus personnelle de ses oeuvres latines, les confessions véritables de son coeur et de son genie.”

⁸ *Secretum* 2.9.5: “. . . quicquid cogitas, quicquid agis, ante oculos meos est.”

⁹ *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 92: dist. V: “Secondo l’ordine preso in principio di questo Trattato, séguita ora a dire della seconda parte principale della Penitenza, che é la confessione: della quale si conviene diligentemente e ordinatamente iscrivere. Imperò che la principale intenzione di coloro a cui stanza l’autore prese a fare

Passavanti says that typically people do not know how to confess well, and that he has been urged to present a proper description. The Dominican emphasis on ignorance, which was a central point in Villani's chronicle and in the notion of *ammaestramenti*, comes to the fore.

We can relate Passavanti's description of the reasons for confession to the *Secretum's* title, for the penitential act, according to the mendicants, centers on exposing concealed sin and then, after confession, on concealing the sin confessed. The sense of concealment attains to both the penitent's conscience and to the sacramental ritual. A quality of proper confession is that of being *secreta*, "private" or "secret," in the words of Bartolomeo da San Concordio, "with regard to the condition of the court in which the matters of conscience that have been kept secret are put to trial."¹⁰ We shall see this juridical language in Passavanti's treatise.

On the issue of secrecy both Dominicans assert authorities—Aquinas, and also Augustine, according to Passavanti—who maintain that confession, by presenting the hope of forgiveness, reveals the "hidden illness" of sin.¹¹ Furthermore Passavanti points to perverse will and desire as the dark source of this illness. Citing David's penitential psalm 6, he writes: "And he says that the weakness is hidden [*nascosta*], that God wishes that at some time the work of sin will be open [*palese*]. The guilty will that is the root and cause of sin is hidden [*occulta*]."¹² It is the responsibility of the priest, as God's vicar, as judge, as doctor [*medico*], to use the secrecy of the confessional to perceive and then heal the "evil will" that lies buried [*celata*] behind the open act of sin confessed by the penitent.¹³ Passavanti's

questo libro, fu per imprendere a sapersi ben confessare: la qual cosa comunemente la gente sa mal fare, impediti o da ignoranza o da negligenza o da vergogna o da certa malizia."

¹⁰ *Summa pisanella* 40va: "secreta s. quantum ad conditionem fori in quo de occultis conscientie agitur," citing Fra Rainaldo da Piperno, who allegedly compiled the *Summa Theologica Supplement*, 9.4, gleaned from *Sentence* commentary IV d.17 q. 3 a. 4.

¹¹ Bartolomeo da San Concordio, *Summa pisanella* 40rb: "confessio est per quam morbus latens spe venie aperitur," quoting Thomas's *Sentence* commentary lib. 4 d.17; also cited by Passavanti, *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 94 (dist. V cap. 1), here alleging Thomas and Augustine, who is the source cited by Thomas.

¹² *Specchio*, 96: "E dice che la 'nfermità é nascosta; chè, avvenga dio che alcuna volta l'opera del peccato sia palese, la volontà rea, ch'è cagione e radice del peccato, é occulta"; see also 135. The line from the Psalter is 6.3: "Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum; sana me, Domine. . . ."

¹³ *Specchio*, 96: "E però, quantunque il peccato sia palese, eziandio al prete

varied use of adjectives for “hidden”—*nascosta, occulta, celata*—emphasizes the psychological nature of sin and the privacy of the confessional. Bartolomeo, for his part, places “bad conscience” as the first of the “many penalties for sin.”¹⁴ Petrarch in his *Secretum* will carry this psychological aspect to a point which questions the unspoken assumptions of the Dominicans about the authority of the confessor.

Passavanti’s reference to the perverse will of the sinner will also be echoed in Petrarch’s dialogue, but the friar does not expand upon this subject. Instead he talks more conventionally of following one’s “appetite of the personal will” into the weakness of sin, along the lines of Rainerio in our discussion of the *exemplum* in the *Decameron*. This will and desire in turn are sustained by sin, leading the sinner “to seek pleasure [*appetiscono*] according to the disorder of one’s vicious desires.”¹⁵ Similarly Bartolomeo, in his penitential *Summa*, describes carnal pleasure [*voluptas*] and its actions as both the cause and effect of the same sin. Using the Aristotelian notion of causation he writes: “and thus it may be one sin formally and many materially; in one sense it may be a principle of disorder and in another many things disordered.”¹⁶ In his vernacular *The Teachings of the Ancients* Bartolomeo cites Aquinas’s syllogism to drive home this point:

When the inferior powers [of the soul] are strongly occupied, the ruling ones are impeded and disordered by them. Through the vice of sensuality the inferior appetite is strongly occupied: therefore the sovereign virtues are disordered, namely reason and the directed will.¹⁷

confessoro si vuole confessare in confessione segretamente, come a giudice, e per la mala volontà ch’è celata, e perch’egli sa il peccato ch’è palese come uomo, e conviene che gli si dica come a vicario di Dio, e a giudice posto sopra i peccatori.” For priest as *medico*, see 67.

¹⁴ *Ammaestramenti*, 210: dist. 23, “Della molte pene del peccato” cap. 1 “di mala coscienza.”

¹⁵ *Specchio*, 93: “. . . anzi, secondo il disordinamento de’ loro viziosi desiderii, appetiscono e disiderano d’aver opportunità e il destro di potere adempiere le loro male volontadi. . . .”

¹⁶ *Summa pisanella*, 227ra: “Utrum voluptas et opus exterius sint unum peccatum. . . . Si loquitur de voluptate et opere prout sunt coniuncta ut causa et effectus. Sic sit unum peccatum formaliter licet plura materialiter. Quod una est ratio deordinandi licet plura deordinata.”

¹⁷ *Ammaestramenti*, 231: dist. 25 cap. 6: “Che lussuria ingrossa lo’ ngengo”: “Quando le virtù sottane sono fortemente occupate, le sovrane se ne impediscono e si disordinano; per lo vizio della lussuria l’appetito sottano è forte occupato, e però le sovrane virtù sono disordinate, cioè la ragione e la diritta volontà.” Bartolomeo’s reference is to *Summa Theologiae*, 22ae qu. 15. The closest approximation to this idea is found 22ae qu. 15, a. 3.: “Vitia autem carnalia, scilicet gula et luxuria, consis-

In the well-ordered soul, one's desires are to follow the dictates of reason as their ordering principle.¹⁸ Analogously, the layman is to obey the prelate in all matters of faith and submit his experiences to his authoritative review.¹⁹ But what if the layman's desires should lead him to question the integrity of the prelate's advice, even to detect inconsistencies on his part? This is a question asked by the humanists, if not so thoroughly by the mendicants.

The priest or confessor, as judge of the confessional, should be, according to Passavanti, of high moral character: "sober-minded, governed by shame [*prudico*], chaste, modest, patient [*mansueto*], pious, benign, affable, liberal, patient . . . secretive, discrete, restrained [*onesto*], expert and above reproach."²⁰ The Dominican also recognizes that many penitents have come to despise their confessors on account of

tunt circa delectationes tactus, ciborum scilicet et venereorum, quae sunt vehementissimae inter omnes corporales delectationes. Et ideo per haec vitia intentio hominis maxime applicatur ad corporalia, et per consequens debilitatur operatio hominis circa intelligibilia, magis autem per luxuriam quam per gulam, quanto delectationes venereorum sunt vehementiores quam ciborum. Et ideo ex luxuria oritur caecitas mentis, quae quasi totaliter spiritualium bonorum cognitionem excludit, ex gula autem hebetudo sensus, quae reddit hominem debilem circa huiusmodi intelligibilia. Et e converso oppositae virtutes, scilicet abstinentia et castitas, maxime disponunt hominem ad perfectionem intellectualis operationis."

¹⁸ Apart from the references in the previous chapter, see Bartolomeo's *Ammaestramenti*, 201–202: dist. 22 cap. 1: "Che'l peccato fa l'uomo peggio che bestia," with reference to Aristotle's *Politics*: "Siccome l'uomo, quando è perfetto, è ottimo di tutti gli animali, così, quando si parte da ragione e giustizia, è pessimo di tutti. . . ."; also 180–181: dist. 18 cap. 4: "Di non essere amico de' rei," referring to Seneca's *De tranquillitate animi*: "Gli amici, quanto fare si può, elleggiamo noi liberi da' disordinati desideri, perocchè entrano i vizi. . . ."

¹⁹ *Summa pisanella*, 205vb–206ra: "layci tenentur obedire prelati ecclesiasticis in his ad quorum observantiam se in baptismo obligaverunt ut teneat [sic] viam fidei/ sed cum operibus abrenuntiant sathane et omnibus pompis et omnibus operibus eius et per consequens quantum ad omne peccatum vitandum et spirituale bonum consequendum." See also Simone Fidati da Cascia's *Vita christiana* II.5 (in Levasti, ed., *Mistici*, 666): "E se egli [the priest] allotta t'ammaestra, ovvero ti ricorda alcuna cosa, ricevelo umilmente e con fede. E sempre abbi questo rispetto di stare a' piedi de Christo."

²⁰ *Specchio*, 125: dist. V cap. 4, for the full list: ". . . ma dee essere sobrio, pudico, casto, modesto, mansueto, pietoso, benigno, affabile, liberale, paziente, fedele, segretiere, tacito, pacifico et quieto, veritiere, caritativo, contenente, onesto, esperto et inreprensibile d'ogni male mendo." Passavanti relates these characteristics to Paul's list in 1 Timothy 3, based on expositions in the *Decretum* by Augustine and Ambrose. This is slightly different from the list of Thomas's *Sentence* commentary [lib.4 d.17 q. 3 a.4] , reiterated by Bartolomeo da San Concordio in his *Summa* [40rb–40va]: "simplex, humilis confessio, pura, fidelis, atque frequens, nuda, discreta, libens, verecunda, integra, secreta, lacrymabilis, accelerata, fortis et accusans, et sit parere parata."

their rigidity and coldness, and for this reason he advises them to proceed with “heartfelt words and mix compassion in with the fear of God’s judgment when needed for contrition and rejection of sin.” Discretion towards the penitent’s state of mind and circumstance therefore determines how the priest “comforts, consoles, counsels and teaches [*ammaestrare*] the sinner.” The confessor should “have compassion toward the sinner, and not be unmerciful or cruel.”²¹

If the formula of “having compassion” recalls the *Decameron’s* opening line, Passavanti’s casting of clerical authority as a *specula mundorum*, a mirror for the laity, also brings to mind Boccaccio’s ironic and humorous portrayal of the clergy’s failings in the tales of the first day. Emilia’s Franciscan inquisitor in I.6 is overly harsh and punitive toward the indiscreet layman, and the story reveals the friar’s cupidity, which he vainly tries to conceal. Passavanti seems aware of the split between the expectations placed upon confessors and their performance. He alludes to a crisis in the confessional not only by undertaking this work, but more specifically in terms of his rhetorical strategy. Rather than illustrating the high spiritual calling of priestly authority through saintly *exempla*, similar to those cited in the previous chapter, he uniformly chooses negative *exempla* of clerical misdeeds or worldly rewards. These *exempla* are presented without humanist irony, for it is fundamental to his treatise that his voice be heard as objective and authoritative, immured from the subjective assessment of the reader.

In accordance with the theme of secrecy, Passavanti maintains that a confessed sin is hidden and forgotten by God, and also concealed from the devil.²² One *exemplum* he uses to illustrate this point deserves full citation, for its gravity of tone and the events it describes highlight the humanist problem with the Church’s penitential authority:

²¹ *Specchio*, 116: “. . . lo dee condocere con parole affectuose e di compassione, mescolandovi della paura del giudicio divino, quando fosse bisogno a contrizione e a lasciare il peccato”; and 120: “Anche dee avere discrezione in sapere riprendere il peccatore, e soavemente e aspramente, secondo che richiede il peccatore e la condizione della persona. Somigliantemente dee essere discreto in sapere confortare, consolare, consigliare e ammaestrare, secondo che richiede la materia e ’l bisogno; a avere compassione al peccatore, e non essere spietato nè crudele. . . .”

²² *Specchio*, 108: dist. V cap. 3: “. . . et dicesi il peccato nascosto e dimenticato da Dio, in quanto Iddio nol vede, e non si ne ricorda a punirlo. . . . Nascondonsi ancora dal diavolo i peccati confessati, de’ quali non puote l’uomo poi accusare.”

One reads in the writing of Cesarius that there was a priest in a villa in the county of Toulouse, who, having become familiar with the wife of a knight of the region, led her into sin. This affair continued for some time, when it was heard about by the knight. He neither wanted to believe it immediately, nor cast off all suspicion, and saying nothing to the priest nor his lady, and showing no sign of suspicion, he asked the priest one day to accompany him to a certain place for a secret meeting [*segreto consiglio*]. And so he took him to a village where there was one possessed by demons, who reproved the sins of all those whom he saw, no matter how secret [*segreti*] these sins may have been. The priest, having heard what the demoniac did, thought that the knight (as was the truth) would conduct him there so that the demoniac would disclose the adultery that the priest had committed with his wife. And having heard that a sin confessed was hidden to the devil, and not having access to a priest, the priest threw himself into a stable where the knight's horse and groom were, and throwing himself at the groom's feet, diligently confessed his sin. When he requested his penitence, the groom replied, "Do whatever penitence you would give to another priest who confessed to you a sin similar to the one you have done." The priest then went with the knight to the demoniac, and the demoniac reproved the sins of the knight and of the others present, yet said nothing to the priest. And when the knight spoke up: "You say nothing to the priest? Consider him well; what do you say of him?" he responded: "Of him I have nothing to say." And having spoken these words in German, which only the knight understood, he said in Latin, "You were justified in the stable," which the priest alone understood. The priest, perceiving the grace of his escape through the virtue [*virtù*] of confession, abandoned his sin and became a monk of the Cistercian Order.²³

²³ *Specchio*, 111–112: dist. V cap. 4 (cited also in *Racconti esemplari* 2:589–591 [§28]): "Onde si legge iscritto de Cesario, che in una villa del contado de Tolosa fu un prete, il quale dimesticandosi con la moglie d'uno cavaliere della contrada, s'indussono a peccato. Il quale continuando per più tempo, fu detto al cavaliere: il quale non volea immantanente credere, nè non rimase però senza sospetto; e non dicendo al prete nè all donna nulla, nè mostrando segno di sospetto veruno, un dì pregò il prete che l'accompagnasse in uno certo luogo, per avere un segreto consiglio. E così lo menò a una villa dov'era uno indemoniato, il quale a tutti quelli che vedeva, rimprovera il loro peccati, quantunche segreti fossono. Il prete ch'avea udito quello ch lo'ndemoniato faceva, si pensò che'l cavaliere, com'era il vero, ve l'avesse condotto acciò che'demonio palesasse l'adulterio ch'egli faceva colla moglie. E avendo udito che il peccato confessato è celato al diavolo, non avendo copia di prete, si gittò nella stalla dov'era il cavallo e' fante del cavaliere; e gittandosi a'piedi del fante, diligentemente confessò il suo peccato; e dimandando la penitenzia, disse il fante: 'Quella penitenzia che voi daresti a un altro prete che vi confessasse simile peccato che avete fatto voi, fate voi.' Andando poi il prete col cavaliere all'indemoniato, e quello rimproverando al cavaliere e agli altri i loro peccati, al prete non

While the *exemplum* illustrates the miraculous power of the sacrament, the priest's crisis is not spiritual: he is afraid of corporal punishment or social humiliation. He uses the secrecy of the confessional to hide from the demoniac's spiritual power, which in turn allows him to conceal his adultery from knight and his retinue. There is a categorically different sense of secrecy in Petrarch's *Secretum*, for in the humanist dialogue secrecy connotes inwardness and introspection, qualities not pronounced in the character of Passavanti's priest.

Like a character from the *Decameron*, Passavanti's priest uses his *ingegno*, his wit, to wriggle out of a tight spot. In Boccaccio's work, a monk, caught in fornication, tricks his abbot; a nun, found with a man, quickly and discretely points out her abbess's hypocrisy.²⁴ Similar to Passavanti's *exemplum*, *Decameron* protagonists use the privacy of confession as a means to practice deception. The opening tale, we have seen, has Cepparello deceive his friar confessor. In third story of the third day, a young woman also exploits a friar's credulity to arrange an assignation with a man she desires; and in the fifth story of the seventh day, a husband's plan misfires when he adopts a confessor's disguise to unmask his wife's adultery.

But although both works, by friar and humanist, recount tales that exploit the secrecy of the confessional to attain worldly ends, this comparison also discloses qualitative differences between mendicant and humanist approaches to ecclesiastical authority, differences fully explored in Petrarch's *Secretum*. In the first instance, Passavanti's *exemplum* emphasizes the supernatural virtue of the sacrament. The demoniac, possessing the gift of perceiving hidden sin, fails to see the priest's transgression, or at least recognizes that it had been secretly confessed. Other *exempla* in the *Mirror* describe similarly miraculous means of "escape," to use Passavanti's term, from worldly detection. Boccaccio's stories largely refrain from spiritual devices.²⁵ True to

diceva niente. Onde disse il cavaliere: 'Tu non di' nulla al prete? tiello ben mente; ch di' tu di lui?' rispose: 'Di costui non dico nulla.' E dicendo queste parole in lingua tedesca, la qual solo il cavaliere intendeva, disse in lingua latina: 'Nella stalla fu giustificato,' il quale solo il prete lo'ntese. Il quale veggendo la grazia del suo iscampo per la virtù della confessione, lasciò il peccato, e fecesi monaco dell'Ordine di Cestella."

If this *exemplum* shows the possibility of lay confession in an emergency, Passavanti quickly adds that any confession spoken to a layman should be quickly repeated to a priest, in order to gain sacramental perfection through the power of the keys (112).

²⁴ *Decameron* I.6 and IX.2.

²⁵ See Varanini's compilation in *Racconti esemplari*: §23 (2:580–582): the contrite

his method of narrating history with empirical sensitivity, his stories tell of earthly mechanisms used to garner earthly rewards. The characters in his stories about confession do not regard the confessional as a supernatural agency, and in fact the confessors are invariably duped. There is, in the *Decameron*, a consistency between agency and ends that is missing in Passavanti's *exempla*. Characters such as Abraam in I.2 and Bergamino in I.7, and their narrators, Neifile and Filostrato, make use of the presuppositions of clerical *exempla*—overt spiritual betterment—in order to show the shortcomings of this tradition. Petrarch for his turn completely revises the nature of the confessional to portray another type of consistency, the need of the psychological examination of experience in order to make ethical progress. Yet the *Mirror's exempla* show how material and social goals may be secured by spiritual means.

This study of Dominican texts also illuminates a second difference between mendicant and humanist approaches to authority, in the contrast between different sets of narrative voices, clerical and lay. In the previous chapter we explored the challenges to authority in the *Decameron's* first day, a challenge expressed not least through the use of lay—and feminine—storytellers. The *Mirror*, on the other hand, is written by a leading Dominican in Florence. It aims to impress upon his audience the vital spiritual importance of penitence in general, and confession in particular. His fellow mendicants share this objective, among whom most prominently Bartolomeo da San Concordio, the compiler of the *Summa pisanella*. Yet Passavanti's *exemplum* shows the reader very little of “true penitence” promised by the work's title. Nor does it emphasize the sanctity of priestly authority. Despite Passavanti's instructions about lay contrition and priestly oversight, the *exempla* he uses in this section typically show, as this one does, worldly gains and venal or foolish clerics. These *exempla*

sister saved from burning [*Specchio*, 103–104]; §25 (2:584–585): the heretic's confession and relief from ordeal [*Specchio*, 107–108]; §27 (2:587–588): fame restored through confession [*Specchio*, 109]; §29 (2:591–593): adulterous priest discretely moved to confession by divine sign [*Specchio*, 125–126]; §32 (2:599–602): the nun Beatrice tempted during confession and her restoration [*Specchio*, 135–137]. The exception to this rule in the *Decameron* is VII.10, of the two Sieneese friends, one of whom visits the other after death and describes purgatory. A few others make use of supernatural elements, such as V.8, the story of Nastagio degli Onesti, which is related to the *exemplum* cited by Passavanti [*Specchio*, 46–48; also in Varanini §11 (2:549–553)] and X.5 and X.9, both featuring magic.

are designed to illustrate to clergy and laity the proper behavior during confession, yet the motivations and consequences of the behavior in the *exempla* are mostly physical, as in the priest's "escape through the *virtù* of confession." The *exempla* therefore, to a discerning reader, stand in contradiction to the mendicant *ammaestramento*: the teaching of reason guiding the emotions, the soul leading the body, and clergy serving as a model for the laity. Here is a second inconsistency between means and ends, with regard to the place of the *exempla* within the work as a whole. The earthly *exempla* address physical concerns and the clergy's lack of moral virtue, while the goal of the *Mirror* is to guide the penitent toward everlasting life by submitting to the Church and its authorities.²⁶ Boccaccio exposes these clerical contradictions in the *Decameron*; Petrarch also treats them with irony in the *Secretum*, though his irony is characteristically more personal and involves also his own, humanist, authority.

If the Dominicans compiled manuals of penance for their lay followers, Petrarch revealed his own emotional life for his readers' scrutiny. His dialogue, the *Secretum*, can be read as a confession by a penitent before a learned, saintly counselor. But even while Petrarch shows evident sensitivity to the power of the act of confession—an act designated in contemporary manuals as *secreta*, "secret"—this sensitivity also revises the roles of both partners in this dialogue, penitent and priest. In the face of the priest's authority, the penitent, in Petrarch's work, becomes not merely a passive pupil subject to moral instruction, but on the contrary an active agent. The priest may speak, yet the penitent must respond, and this response includes scrutinizing, weighing, and authorizing the proffered guidance.

Alexander Murray has argued that medieval confessors strengthened their practice by learning from their own experiences and the experiences of their flock. For example Robert Grosseteste, the thirteenth-century bishop of Lincoln, translated Aristotle's *Nicomachaen Ethics* to provide confessors with moral advice related more closely to the lives of those they advised.²⁷ Yet our knowledge of these develop-

²⁶ Although Getto does not expose these contradictions in Passavanti's use of *exempla*, he notes that the *exempla* are designed to provide a "senso di avventura," a "specie di meditazione fra cultura e popolo." "Umanità e stile di Iacopo Passavanti," in *Letteratura religiosa del Trecento*, 59, 61.

²⁷ "Counselling in Medieval Confession," in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle*

ments is limited, and often inferred from sources. Petrarch's dialogue shifts the focus from confessor to penitent, and explores how the penitent applies his understanding of experience to the evaluation of clerical counsel.

We discover, by comparing the *Secretum* to clerical writings, a more accurate conception of its historical valence; we see that Petrarch's humanism is not estranged from philosophical statement, but on the contrary conveys its own. The formal designs of the humanist, his poetry and rhetoric, are not ventures separate from the quest for moral wisdom, but in fact the means of voyaging toward this goal. Petrarch reacts to the Church's concept of penitential pilgrimage and portrays it as a process of self-knowledge, a process that for him conducts itself in the existential, rather than in the ecclesiastical realm.²⁸

The term "existential" must be defined more precisely. The *Secretum* illuminates, first of all, a troubled scepticism toward the Church's system of moral doctrine. Petrarch confronts the metaphysical certainties of the Church concerning human nature without resorting to other pre-conceived metaphysical postulates that he might garner, in his eclectic way, from Platonism or Stoicism.²⁹ Instead his experience engages him to question the traditional ontology implicit in metaphysical assertions, and to do so in a way that awakens the reader to appreciate the flow of existence and to grasp the significance of the momentary, the transitory, the historical.³⁰

Ages, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 1998), 63–77, 72–75. See Augustine's acceptance of the Peripatetic position in *Secretum* 2.10.5; also 2.7.4.

²⁸ Though Mazzotta's analysis of Petrarch's confrontation with authority does not emphasize how it communicates its involvement in the flow of existence, I agree with his statement in *The Worlds of Petrarch* (81): "Genuine knowledge for Petrarch . . . is time-bound, and it consists in the recognition of the open possibilities of one's contingent experience."

²⁹ See *Fam.* VI.2.1, cited in Chapter 1, for Petrarch's eclecticism. Kenelm Foster asserts that Petrarch evokes both philosophical traditions in the first part of the *Secretum* to present a hybrid sense of *virtus* [virtue]: ". . . as an ontological perfection *virtus* relates to platonist [*sic*] metaphysics, as a moral perfection it relates, through the way it is presented, to Stoicism." *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1984), 163.

³⁰ Therefore Stoicism does not simply conflict with Christianity as the moral key, as has been argued by Klaus Heitmann. See Heitmann, "Augustins Lehre in Petrarchas *Secretum*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 22 (1960): 34–53, especially 40–43 and the abbreviated Italian version "L'Insegnamento Agostiniano nel

The prime experience in the *Secretum* is the unhappiness of Petrarch's autobiographical persona, Franciscus. Franciscus tells his troubles to a figure of St. Augustine of Hippo, Augustinus. Scholars have long debated the meaning of these two personae: they could signify two aspects of Petrarch's divided self, or a hidden praise or critique of Stoicism, or a way of validating Petrarch's literary mission.³¹ In

'Secretum' del Petrarca," *Studi petrarcheschi* 7 (1961): 187–193, especially 189–190. Donatella Baldarotta has written a more nuanced study of the work in this regard: "Felicità, infelicità e sommo bene nel *Secretum* di Francesco Petrarca," *Res publica litterarum* 18 (1995): 107–118. Yet she maintains a conceptual division between Stoicism and Trecento Christian dogma, and elides Augustinus with the historical Augustine. As we have noted, Stoical sentiments were consistently adapted by Christian moralists during the Trecento, such as Bartolomeo da San Concordio and Rainerio da Pisa.

The motif of confession has been examined more extensively with regard to Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux, as described in *Fam.* IV.1. Appraisals of this aspect in IV.1 include Carolyn Chiapelli's "The Motif of Confession in Petrarch's 'Mount Ventoux,'" *Modern Language Notes* 93, no. 1 (1978): 131–136, which analyzes his proximity to the *Confessions*; and Michael O'Connell's "Authority and the Truth of Experience in Petrarch's 'Ascent of Mount Ventoux,'" *Philological Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (1983): 507–520. O'Connell notes that Petrarch "implicitly validates sensory knowledge as a necessary step toward the discovery of the interior self" (512), yet sees the *Secretum*, in contrast to the letter, as failing to reconcile the twin demands of spiritual virtue—moving the will instantaneously—and of more gradual spiritual awareness (515–516). O'Connell senses "a certain psychological crudity" in Augustinus's view of human love, and evidently sees the *Secretum* as being composed prior to the letter, since the letter "may well represent the emergence in Petrarch's thought of a more developed and genuine Augustinianism" (516). But like other commentators O'Connell does not consider that Petrarch in both works is moving the valuation of authority into a temporal, historical process, in which the reader is implicated. In "Reading, Writing and the Self: Petrarch and His Forerunners" (*New Literary History* 26 [1995]: 717–730), Brian Stock has remarked, "... it is the reader who judges the moral value of his [Petrarch's] literary reputation—which is what he wants" (722); this assessment by the reader, however, is not elaborated in relation to the form of the dialogue, especially its rootedness in time. Lyell Asher ("Petrarch at the Peak of Fame," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 108, no. 5 [1993]: 1050–1063) sees a dual purpose in the letter: a private confession to Dionigi da San Sepolcro, decrying his faults, and also an "act of self-representation" formed by his "implacable desire to attract and hold the attentions of posterity" (1051–1052). Asher sees the two desires in conflict, since the end of confession, conversion, "put[s] an end to personality" (1052–1053). But there is little justification for this view of Augustinian or Trecento conversion, nor need every confession lead to conversion.

³¹ For Pierre Courcelle, the *Confessions* offer Petrarch a means of self-reflection: he is interested more in his anxiety than in prayer or contrition, more in the Augustine before his conversion than in the one afterwards, more in literature and philosophy than in theology: "Pétrarque entre Saint Augustin e les Augustins," 66–68; Francesco Tateo claims there is a confrontation between the "old man" [*vecchio uomo*] of Franciscus, a literary fiction of Petrarch, and the positive figure of Augustinus, who integrates classical and Christian teaching; *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica nel "Secretum" del Petrarca* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), 31–38; Klaus

different ways, scholars have noted the central position of Augustine's life and thought in Petrarch's own self-understanding. What they have not adequately considered are the formal qualities presented by the dialogue itself, and the philosophical implications of these qualities. Petrarch's work moves beyond a reading of Augustine: in this conversation the flow of time and history—the existential—shapes the struggle for ethical insight.³²

The style of the work discloses how it is involved in time and history. This involvement appears, on the smaller scale, through the sequence and alterations of viewpoint in the course of the dialogue, divided over three days; on the larger scale, changes wrought by time and history show forth in the differences between Petrarch's

Heitmann asserts that Petrarch “den ihm so sympathischem Heiligen Augustin zum Häretiker werden lässt” in order to justify his pursuit of classical learning: “Augustinus Lehre,” 53; William Bouwsma views the dialogue as confronting a Stoical emphasis on reason, largely represented by Augustinus himself, against an Augustinian stress on voluntarism and the unity of human faculties: “The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought” in *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations*, ed. Heiko O. Oberman and Thomas Brady, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3–60, esp. 19, 28–31, 34–45; Trinkaus (*Poet as Philosopher*, 57–71) sees Augustinus in the dialogue proposing an “obvious conflation of Stoic doctrine and Christian Augustinianism,” a position that stresses a “double consciousness” in Petrarch (61, 64); Foster (*Petrarch*, 162) views Franciscus to be autobiographical, Augustinus as “the accusing-conscious figure” who evaluates Petrarch's pursuit of goodness; Victoria Kahn considers that the *Secretum* focuses upon “the problem of defining the will as a faculty of interpretation,” rather than upon moral or psychological concerns: “The Figure of the Reader in Petrarch's *Secretum*,” *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 100, no. 1 (1985): 154–166, 155; Carol Quillen maintains that Petrarch “invented” an Augustine “who not only sanctioned but insisted upon the use of classical literature in the human search for spiritual health. . . .”: “A Tradition Invented: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 2 (1992): 179–207, 207. Quillen modifies her position in her book *Rereading the Renaissance*, ch. 5, 182–216, finding that the dialogue both validates and places in doubt the humanist recovery of antiquity (190, 204–209). Brian Stock, similar to Tateo and Foster, reads the two interlocutors as different aspects of Petrarch's personality: Franciscus represents Petrarch as he was, Augustinus as who he would like to be: *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 75–76.

³² Kahn views the work as “primarily a reading of Augustine's *Confessions*”: “The Figure of the Reader,” 155, her emphasis; Heitmann, Bouwsma and Quillen analyze how Petrarch presents a particular, distorted vision of the historical Augustine, a point we shall review below, with Quillen noting vacillations in Augustinus's positions (*Rereading the Renaissance*, 187). Thomas Greene sees the *Secretum* as evidence for the “dialectical imitation” in humanism (*Light in Troy*, 46): “Within Petrarch's canon, one clear example [of dialectical imitation] would be the *Secretum*, maintaining as it does its powerful and unresolved engagement with the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.”

Augustinus and the actual Church Father, the author of the *Confessions*. These features in the *Secretum*, of mutable dialogue and personae, form the basis upon which all interpretation must originate. These features indicate that the vagaries of recollected experience, even in the confessional, condition how one accepts ecclesiastical or moral authority, whether this experience is of Franciscus, Petrarch, or, by extension, the reader of the work.³³

Experience and authority for Petrarch are therefore related to one another in a paradoxical way. The transitory, historical self and its experiences must in fact authorize the authority, since it sees the time-bound, historical quality of this authority as well. Franciscus must discern the truth of Augustinus's advice, even when this advice seems inconsistent. Their conversation, apparently inconclusive, in turn forces the reader to authorize his own conclusions about this counsel. In the end the reader comes to appreciate not only the distance between Franciscus and Augustinus's points of view, but also the task of discovering the truth that emanates from this conversation. Although Franciscus and Augustinus talk directly with one another, the meaning of this encounter waits upon the reader's own determination.

But this writing of Petrarch raises a further question only intermittently analyzed in his other works: how does one recognize the authority of dogmatic counsel, should one's personal experience and conscience say otherwise? That penitents often contested their guilt was noted by the Dominican Remigio de' Girolami, who preached in a Lenten sermon: "For the soul comes to ruin in defending its sin."³⁴ The *Secretum* answers this conflict in a way consistently paradoxical for the reader and problematic for the Church. Augustinus possesses the greatest authority when he permits the penitent Franciscus to call it into question, when he allows Franciscus to speak with his own voice, and respond to claims according to his own pace, instead of merely submitting to didactic browbeating. Franciscus then undertakes an open, genuine appraisal of his own experience and Augustinus's advice.

³³ See 3.7.11: "de medio experientie libro"

³⁴ Cited by Murray, "Counselling in Medieval Confession," 75n: "Sepellitur enim anima in defensione peccati."

Petrarch entitles “his little book” with the words “my secret,” for it is private, “fleeing the company of men,” and it reminds him of everything said *in abdito*, in the solitude and remove with himself.³⁵ It is not surprising then if scholars have understood the title to refer to Augustine’s own refuge in his garden preceding his conversion, as he describes it in Book VIII of the *Confessions*.³⁶ Yet moving beyond a reading of this autobiography, the *Secretum* chooses this reference to underscore the inward exchange of ideas, deep within oneself, as Petrarch makes clear in *On the Life of Solitude*. He emphasizes the emotional crisis at the heart of the *Confessions*: “He [Augustine] used for his solitude a secret corner [*secretum . . . angulum*] of his garden,” Petrarch writes, “. . . holding bitter converse with himself, amid sobbing and weeping. . . .”³⁷ Thus Petrarch envisions the place where the Church Father may talk with himself, uncovering his cares, in a way the humanist would replicate in his own dialogue. Considering this solitude as necessary for spiritual insight, he cites Augustine’s commentary on John’s Gospel: “that vision of Christ calls for a private place [. . . visio ista [Christi] secretum desiderat].”³⁸

As Augustine’s inner controversy probes the recesses of his heart, the *Secretum*’s title also alludes to the Trecento Church’s understanding of confession, going back to Augustine, in which the “concealed illness” of sin is revealed when prompted by the hope of forgiveness. Secrecy and openness, a theme of Petrarch’s dialogue, is at the heart of the confessional. If to Passavanti penitential practice brings hidden sins secretly into the open, this movement is also underway in

³⁵ Prohemium 4.1: “Tuque ideo, libelle, conventus hominum fugiens, mecum mansisse contentus eris, nominis propriis non immemor. *Secretum enim meum* es et diceris; michique in altioribus occupato, ut unumquodque in abdito dictum meministi, in abdito memorabis.”

³⁶ As argued by Victoria Kahn, “The Figure of the Reader,” 155, citing David Marsh’s *Quattrocento Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980). See *Confessions* 8.8.19: “abscessi ergo in hortum, et Alypius pedem post pedem. neque enim secretum meum non erat, ubi ille aderat.” By Augustine’s own account, his friend Alypius accompanied him without intruding on his refuge.

³⁷ *The Life of Solitude*, 210; *De vita solitaria* 2.IV.10 (216): “secretum orti angulum pro solitudine habuit . . . [u]bi amarissime secum loquens inter singultus et lacrimas.” See *Confessions* 8.11.27: “ista controversia in corde meo non nisi de me ipso adversus me ipsum.”

³⁸ *De vita solitaria* 2.IV.11 (216) [of PL 35, 1533]. See also 1.VII.8 (126). See also *De remediis utriusque fortune* I.50 and I.51 (1:252, 1:258), where the figure of Ratio declares “tam multe tamque inperscrutabiles ac profunde sunt pectorum cavernae” and “cum sint inter notissimos quoque tot pectorum diversoria, tot latebre.”

Franciscus's conversation with Augustinus. It is debatable whether the humanist Petrarch intended to keep his story hidden from his readers;³⁹ Petrarch's designation of his work as *secretum meum* confronts the readers with an open secret, a self-conscious exhibit of what happens in the privacy of Petrarch's ideal confessional. Church law permitted the laity's release of their confession, but Petrarch details the entire conversation, in which the limits of priestly authority also come to light.

Like Passavanti's *Mirror of True Penitence*, the *Secretum* is forged under the pressure of time's passage toward mortality. One of the main reasons for immediate penance, Passavanti writes, "is the uncertainty of the time of one's death, for no one is certain when he must die."⁴⁰ Passavanti cites St. Augustine as one of his authorities: "God, who promises you forgiveness should you repent, does not promise you tomorrow for your repentance."⁴¹ Similarly in the *Secretum* Augustinus opens the dialogue with Franciscus by reminding him of his mortal nature and warning him of the delay in choosing his true happiness: "What are you doing, little man? What are you dreaming of? What are you waiting for? Have you completely forgotten your miseries? Do you not remember that you are mortal [destined for death]?"⁴² Should Petrarch have revised the *Secretum* between 1349 and 1353, which scholars have argued,⁴³ then its genesis coincides

³⁹ See the discussion of Petrarch's intentions by Hans Baron, *Petrarch's "Secretum": Its Making and Its Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1985), 185–196. Baron believes that Petrarch did not show the text to his friends; this is disputed by Francisco Rico in his *Vida u obra de Petrarca*, vol. 1 (Padua, Antentore, 1974), 32–33.

⁴⁰ *Specchio*, 17: d.II, c.3: "La terza cosa che c'induce a fare penitenzia e a non indugiarla, è la incertitudine della morte, chè niuno è certo quando debba morire." See also Bartolomeo's *Ammaestramenti* 143–146: dist. 13: "Di providenza verso la morte," in which he cites almost exclusively ecclesiastical writers, and states: "Che la morte, perchè non è saputa, sempre è da aspettare"; and Simone Fidati's *Vita christiana* I.8 (Levasti, *Mistici*, 622): "Considera, anima, il dì della tua morte, la quale tostissamente dee venire, e non saprai quando. E però non doveremo viver in quello stato nel quale dubitiamo di morire, pero ch'è così incerto."

⁴¹ *Specchio*, loc. cit.: "Iddio, che ti promette perdonanza de' tuoi peccati se ti peniterai, non ti promette il dì di domane, nel quale ti possa pentere."

⁴² 1.1.1: "Quid agis, homuncio? quid somnias? quis expectas? Miseriarum ne tuarum sic prorsus oblitus es? An non te mortalem esse meministi?"

⁴³ See the summaries of debates over the dating by Craig Kallendorf, "The Historical Petrarch," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996): 130–141, especially 134–138 and by Ugo Dotti, *Secretum*, vii–x. Francisco Rico presents evidence for substantial revisions of the work in 1349 and 1353 (*Vida u obra de Petrarca*, 479–483), whereas Hans Baron's *Petrarch's Secretum* sees only slighter modifications after an initial draft of 1347 (181–183). Bortolo Martinelli and Giovanni Ponte on the other

closely with that of the *Mirror*—and the *Decameron*—and illustrates like these works an urgent cultural response to the Black Death.

In contrast to the Dominican treatise, however, the *Secretum* revolves around Franciscus and Augustinus's debate over the authenticity of Franciscus's experience. For when Augustinus accuses him of ignoring the true depths of his misery, and his mortality, Franciscus denies the accusation, putting forth his conscience as his witness. In fact his conscience becomes the court of appeal for both men.⁴⁴ Augustinus consistently urges Franciscus to turn inward and acknowledge the truth of his claims: that Franciscus is unhappy through his own weakness of will, that his *felicitas* is found only in virtue, which lies in his power should he only move himself to exercise it.⁴⁵ For his part Franciscus replies that he understands the nature of his misery well enough, only that he is not able to apply his will to this task.

The way the *Secretum* attempts to break this impasse is, in context of the medieval confessional, revolutionary. Augustinus tells Franciscus of his own experience, of his conversion, as proof of the power of the will. "I remained the man I was [in spiritual agony], until a deep meditation at last crystallized before my eyes my entire misery. Then afterwards I was able to achieve what I willed fully, and with an amazing and most happy suddenness I was transformed into a different Augustine."⁴⁶ Augustinus therefore wants Franciscus to recognize his authority because he has experienced the success of what he preaches. As he tells Franciscus throughout, one must not understand an idea only intellectually; one must transform one's life in light of it.⁴⁷

hand consider the work to be composed in 1342–1343. See Ponte, "Nella selva del Petrarca: la discussa data del *Secretum*," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 67 (1990): 1–63, especially 62; Martinelli, review of Baron's *Petrarch's "Secretum"* in *Speculum* 62 (1987): 644–648. Kenelm Foster's *Petrarch* supports Rico's contention (167–169, 179–185).

⁴⁴ See 1.8.5, 2.2.6, 2.4.1, 2.4.7. See also *De otio religioso* 96.7–9: "Introeat pro se quisque in ipsa penetrabilia pectoris sui conscientiamque discutiat: quisquis ibi se felicem iudicat, et me mentitum indicet."

⁴⁵ 1.4.5–6, 1.7.1.

⁴⁶ 1.5.5: "Et tamen hec inter idem ille qui fueram mansi, donec alta tandem meditatio omnem miseriam meam ante oculos congescit. Itaque postquam plene volui, licet et potui, miraque et felicissima celeritate transformatus sum in alterum Augustinum. . . ."

⁴⁷ 1.10.7, 2.2.7, 2.5.5, 2.16.1, 3.10.5, 3.14.2. See the introspection and focus on the psychological in *De otio religioso*: on presumption and fear (13.34–14.2); on doubt (33.31–34.4); on conscience as a force for *erasing* memory (37.24–26); and on human diffidence and fickleness (91.11–21).

In reply Franciscus claims he remains morally at sea, far from reaching the port of safety gained by Augustinus's conversion; but, he adds, "nonetheless amid my storms I recognize a trace of your fluctuations."⁴⁸ Knowing Augustinus's own battles, he finds a sympathetic channel to his counsel.

The way this exchange resolves the deadlock over authority becomes emblematic for the rest of the work: Franciscus repeatedly resists Augustinus's didacticism, until Augustinus alters his approach, and allows a moment for Franciscus to characterize himself [1.15.3]. The second day finds the two men enmeshed in a similar struggle, before Augustinus replaces assertions with questions, leading rather than forcing Franciscus along the path to self-examination [2.4.1–4.7; 2.7.8]. In the process Franciscus reveals the testimony of his experience in ever greater measure, declaring his devotion at one point to both Apollo and Bacchus, internal and external goods [2.7.9]. Later, after Augustinus discusses his own experience with procrastination [2.11.8], Franciscus defines his spiritual malaise in his own terms [2.13.3–8]. Augustinus starts Day 3 by asking Franciscus where he would like to begin and the dialogue becomes increasingly concrete in its biographical detail [3.1, 3.5.11ff.].

The movement of the *Secretum* is therefore one of cyclical progression. The dialogue begins by discussing Franciscus's general malaise (Day 1), proceeds to review his more specific moral failings (Day 2), eventually exposing the "two chains" that bind his soul: love and fame (Day 3).⁴⁹ It closes with Franciscus's uncertain acquiescence to the counsel of Augustinus, who advises him to free his soul by choosing the path of virtue and true, Christian glory. Throughout this progress the two men clash repeatedly and the conflict escalates, with the gravity of Augustinus's counsel both restraining and being resisted by the force of Franciscus's emotional impulses.

As the dialogue moves forward, both Augustinus and Franciscus proclaim that moral rhetoric admonishes the listener most persuasively when it aligns with the listener's sense of his experience. Franciscus says he believes Plato's moral psychology confirmed by "authority and reason and experience" and Augustinus declares that

⁴⁸ 1.6.3: "... tamen inter procellas meas fluctuationis tue vestigium recognosco."

⁴⁹ 3.1.2: "A[ugustinus]: Duabus adhuc adamantinis dextra levaque premeris catenis, que ned de morte neque de vita sinunt cogitare." Augustinus identifies these chains in 3.2.1 as "amor et gloria."

Seneca's sentence on the snares of love is verified by "the most intimate depths of experience". Completing this circular relation, Augustinus cites Seneca's authority on the necessity of self-examination, of learning from one's own life.⁵⁰

Nonetheless the alignment of experience and authority is unstable and shifting. Franciscus puts forward authorities to back up his attention to physical goods; but he later yields this position as superficial when convinced by the claims of Stoicism [2.4–6; 2.8.5]. Equally troubling for Franciscus, and for Petrarch and his reader, is Augustinus's own account of his conversion. Augustinus, striving to impress Franciscus with Stoical urgency to exert his will, fails to mention the role of grace in the event, the child crying "Tolle, lege" and the Scriptural passage from St. Paul commanding him to "arm yoursel[f] with the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵¹

Nor is this the only occasion where Augustinus shows a lapse of memory about his life and work. If he omits the power of grace in his own biography, he appears to forget, later in Day I, a reading of the *Aeneid* recorded in the *City of God*. The *City of God* states that for Christians sin originates in the soul, not the body, distinguishing the Christian position from that suggested by Virgil in *Aen.* VI [730–734]. But Augustinus quotes this same Virgilian passage in the *Secretum* to emphasize that the corporeal passions do indeed corrupt "our better nature," in accord with his Platonic or Stoical cast of argument. It does not re-inforce the reader's respect for Augustinus when he subsequently supports this soul-body distinction with a Scriptural passage he attributes to St. Paul, when in fact the passage is from the Book of Wisdom.⁵²

Scholars have seen in this confusion over Biblical references a mistake on Petrarch's part; it is claimed that he mixed up the references cited by Augustine in the *City of God*.⁵³ On a broader level,

⁵⁰ 2.11.5: "... Platonis hanc sententiam michi pridem adeo et autoritas et ratio et experientia commendat. . . ."; 3.9.6: "O verissimum et ex intimis experientie penetrabilibus erutum verbum!"; 3.12.7: "Memento quid in *Quaestionibus naturalibus* scriptum est. Ad hoc enim 'inventum sunt specula, ut homo ipse se nosceret.'"

⁵¹ *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 177–178 (VIII.12: "induite dominum Iesum Christum").

⁵² 1.15.2: "nature melioris"; 1.15.4: Sap. 9.15; see *Fam.* II.5.4 on this reading of Virgil.

⁵³ Carol Quillen, "A Tradition Invented," 204 n. 94 cites the argument of E. Carrara in his edition of the *Secretum* in Petrarca, *Prose*, ed. Martellotti, an argument followed by Doti in his note on 1.15.4 (p. 46).

commentators have interpreted Petrarch's use, or mis-use, of Augustine's writings as way of challenging Christian orthodoxy or of validating his own humanist interests in classical literature.⁵⁴

But we may ask: what are Petrarch's humanist interests? There is epistemological meaning to this pattern of omission and distortion. Petrarch writes a dialogue in which the reader is asked to question authority, and made aware of the unsteady nature of thought on the sea of time and experience. Is Augustinus at fault for these lapses? Or is Franciscus, in his memory of the conversation? Or Petrarch, as the author of the piece? Time, memory and experience all condition not only our understanding of authorities, but also the character of the authorities themselves. Despite their holiness, Petrarch suggests, saints do not live outside of time, but have human faces.⁵⁵ Their moral authority, their virtue, is therefore mediated by their humanity.

⁵⁴ Quillen, "A Tradition Invented," 203–204; Heitmann claims that Petrarch wanted to emphasize the "dignitas hominis" in contrast to the conventional emphasis on human sinfulness ("Augustins Lehre," 52).

⁵⁵ In the *De otio religioso* Petrarch discusses at length how the pagans deified human beings through acclamation: they were saints not in truth, but only according to popular opinion: 86.30–88.10. While Petrarch does not address Christian sainthood, this attack and open scepticism toward human motives reminds one of Boccaccio's tale of Saint Ciappelletto in *Decameron* I.1. In his *Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italie* (§47–48) he is more explicit: "Sed illud dico, quod—licet hodie procul dubio sanctus sit [Bernard]—fieri potest ut, dum ad Eugenium scripsit, nondum fortisan sanctus esset. Sanctitas enim, sicut omnis virtus, non cum homine nascitur, sed studio queritur et augetur, et frequentatis actibus in habitum transit. Itaque michi aliud assumo, quod in quadam excusatoria epystola ad episcopum Mimatensum Berengarius idem ait: 'Nonne abbas homo est? . . .' Homo erat et, in carne positus, passionibus subiacerere poterat. Notum est illud Iohannis Osaurei non de sanctis quibuslibet, se de ipsis apostolis: 'Nam etsi sancti sunt,' inquit, 'homines tamen sunt: etsi vinci a carne non possunt, quasi iam spirituales, tamen percuti possunt, quasi adhuc carnales.'" ["Bernard is doubtless a saint today, but he was perhaps not yet a saint when he wrote to pope Eugene. For like other virtues, saintliness is not innate in a person, but is acquired; it increases with practice, and becomes a habit through repeated actions. So I borrow another passage that this same Berengar wrote in an apologetic letter to the bishop of Mende: 'Isn't an abbot a man? . . .' He was human and, dwelling in the flesh, he may have been subject to passions. Everyone knows what John Chrysostom said not only about saints, but about the apostles themselves: 'Even if they are saints, they are still human. Even if they are nearly spiritual and cannot be overcome by the flesh, they are still carnal and can be stirred by it.'"]. *Invectives*, 404–407; ed. trans.

See Bouwsma's reference to "the humanization of Saint Augustine" in the dialogue, on the basis of appearing as "a man, however venerable": "The Two Faces of Humanism," 35. Baron also speaks of "Augustine's insensitive condemnation [of love] in the *Secretum*," an imbalance he views Petrarch attempting to correct in his canzone 360 (*Petrarch's "Secretum"*, 67).

And the authority-figure of the *Secretum*, Augustinus, must be understood in light of the reader's view of his personality.

That Augustinus speaks through different personalities, however, complicates a reading of Augustinus's authority: he dons the dress both of the classical scholar and of the father confessor. He asserts his authority not only with humanist erudition, but also as a sainted bishop. From his position in the confessional he examines the nature of Franciscus's life and exposes its desires, often declaring him "demented" [*demens*] or afflicted with madness [*amentia, insania*].⁵⁶ Petrarch sharpens the contrast between these two sides of this persona by having the Church Father limit the study of the classics. This restriction presents the reader with further interpretative problems, which he or she may resolve by appreciating the paradox at the heart of the work.

Augustinus tells Franciscus that the drive to learn, when devoted only to the experience of fame, diverts him from finding the highest, the only good—the true happiness—in the realm of the Divine. "For what reason do you engage in this perpetual work, these ceaseless vigils, your furious zeal for study? . . . While you are writing for others, you forget yourself." Augustinus claims first of all that any work Franciscus produces, no matter its excellence, only distracts him from his spiritual needs. Furthermore its splendor will be passing, transient, "compressed as it is," he says, "by the limits of place and time."⁵⁷

Franciscus reacts to Augustinus's criticisms, once again, through an assertion of his conscience. Seeing in Augustinus's remarks a reference to Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," in which one's glory is diminished in relation to the infinite, he calls it "an old and trite story among the philosophers. . . . I know from experience these arguments are more specious than convincing."⁵⁸ In contrast to Petrarch's sources for the "old story"—Cicero's *De Republica* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*—the *Secretum* has Franciscus dispute the validity of traditional

⁵⁶ E.g. 3.16.1.

⁵⁷ 3.14.6,10: "Quo enim spectat labor iste perpetuus continueque vigilie ac vehemens impetus studiorum? . . . deque aliis scribens, tui ipsius oblivisceris"; 3.15.2: "Adde quod hoc ipsum preclarum neque late patet, nec in longum porrigitur, locorumque ac temporum augustiis coartatur."

⁵⁸ 3.15.3: "Intelligo istam veteram et tritam iam inter philosophos fabellam. . . . Hec enim relatu magis speciosa quam efficacia sum expertus."

authority and demand more persuasive argument. The disciples in the earlier dialogues, Scipio Aemilianus and Boethius, hardly challenge the visions of their guides, Scipio the Elder and Lady Philosophia. Petrarch revises this tradition in an important way. Because Franciscus has a more independent role in the encounter than do his forebears, and appeals to the voice of his “experience,” Petrarch implicitly questions undue reverence toward authority, be it a classical or ecclesiastical author.⁵⁹

Yet the rejoinder by Franciscus provokes Augustinus to marshal a broader context for Franciscus’s experience, a context which aims at undermining his deceptive sense of self-knowledge. Augustinus tells Franciscus that this “Dream” contains truth; the geographical diversity of human customs allies itself with a still greater menace to fame, that of time. Striking at the deepest fears of his humanist disciple, Augustinus says: “. . . consider the destruction of books, in which your name has been inserted by your own hand or by another’s. . . . they are consigned to their old age and their mortality.” At this point Augustinus quotes from Petrarch’s own work, his incomplete epic poem *Africa*: “For whatsoever mortal hand has made/with its vain effort shall be mortal, too.” Augustinus now returns to emphasize what he did at the outset of the dialogue, the theme of temporality and mutability that permeates all earthly things: “Sky earth and sea are changing: what is man, the most fragile of animals, able to hope? The vicissitudes of the seasons run through their courses and again, never staying put; if you think you will can stay, you are deceived.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Augustinus in fact encourages Franciscus, on the first day of dialogue, to react to his indictment: “Neque igitur, qui pigrioris et torpentis ingenii mos est, passim omnibus acquiescere conveniet. . . .” [1.6.4]. So if Augustinus plays the role of father-confessor, his words are not beyond question. Augustinus’s encouragement stands in contrast to the typical attitude of medieval clergy, who reinforced their authority over the laity by citing instructions from handbooks of penitence. The “Dream” was originally part of Cicero’s *De Republica* (6.9–29), then later excerpted as an entire work in the commentary by Macrobius in fourth century C.E. In his late work (ca. 524) Boethius has Philosophia overtly recount this Dream and commentary, with his own variations, in *De consolatione philosophiae* II.7.

⁶⁰ 3.16.10: “Adde librorum interitum, quibus vel propriis vel alienis manibus vestrum nomen insertum est. . . . senium suum suaque illis mortalitas annexa est. ‘Mortalia namque / esse decet quaecunq; labor mortalis inani / edidit ingenio. . . .’”; 3.17.7: “Celum terra maria mutantur; quid homo, fragilissimum animal, sperare potest? Vicissitudo temporum suos cursus recursusque peragit, numquam permanens; tu si permanere posse putas, falleris.” See similar expression on human fragility and one’s temporal and spatial limitations in *De otio religioso* 45.30–46.3.

After citing Franciscus's own *Africa*, Augustinus then adds the 'elegant' verse of Horace, "Her losses soon the moon supplies, But wretched man, when once he lies [Where Priam and his sons are laid, Is naught but ashes and a shade]." ⁶¹

But if Franciscus will achieve his happiness by following Augustinus's advice, he must abandon his classical studies, his histories of the Romans, his *Africa*. "Leave all this on one side," Augustinus says, "and now at length take possession of yourself. To come back to our starting point, let me urge you to enter upon the meditation of death, which comes on step by step without your being aware. . . . And think that you are tied to the moving stars, that you have no hope of safety, unless in Him who does not change and suffers no decline." ⁶² One moves to recovering one's self, for Augustinus, by experiencing earthly mutability and divine permanence.

In the confrontation between teacher and student over the pursuit of fame, Franciscus gives way to Augustinus. He tells Augustinus he has heard the substance of these arguments before; "nonetheless," he states, "the dignity of the words and the order of narration and the authority of the speaker impress me greatly." ⁶³

How are we to interpret this concession? Does the *Secretum* adumbrate a close for Petrarch's humanism? Has the monk-like Augustinus won out over the classical scholar as Petrarch's true authority? Has the search for *felicitas* been supplanted by a yearning for Christian beatitude, leading one to withdraw from the earthly realm? ⁶⁴

⁶¹ 3.17.7: "damna tamen celeres reparant caelestia lunc; / nos ubi decidimus. . . ." Samuel Johnson's translation of Horace, Odes IV.7 in *The Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 38.

⁶² 3.17.6, 9: "His igitur posthabitis, te tandem tibi restituere, ut unde movimus revertamur, incipe tecum de morte cogitare, cui sensim et nescius appropinquas. . . . scito te cum illis impelli nullamque, nisi in Eo, qui non movetur quique occasum nescit, superesse fiduciam subsistendi."

⁶³ 3.16.12: "verborum dignitas et narrationis series et loquentis autoritas multum valent."

⁶⁴ See Heitmann, "Augustins Lehre," 48: "Ihnen [Einzelheiten] zum Trotz dürfte aus der ganzen soeben angestellten vergleichenden Analyse deutlich geworden sein, dass von der so oft behaupteten völligen Harmonie zwischen christlicher und antik-philosophischer Tradition in Petrarca's *Secretum* nicht die Rede sein kann." Heitmann sees the 'anti-Augustinian' Augustinus predominating.

Kaspar Elm has pointed out how the Augustinians emphasized monastic practices within the order through their portrayals of Augustine: "Mendikanten und Humanisten im Florenz," 278–279. See also the references in Chapter 1 to Rudolph Arbesmann, "The 'Vita Aurelii Augustinii Episcopi,'" "Mönchslegenden in mittelalterlichen Augustinusviten," and "A Legendary of Early Augustinian Saints," and M. de Kroon, "Pseudo-Augustin im Mittelalter."

In this dialogue, Petrarch brings both aspects of Augustinus's authority into focus, and portrays the tension and harmony between them. For although Augustinus demands Petrarch disengage himself from the classical world, the *Secretum* nonetheless expresses Petrarch's heartfelt devotion to classical themes, in relation to ecclesiastical didacticism.⁶⁵ At his angriest, Augustinus does not speak in the conventional language of sin and judgment.⁶⁶ In fact Augustinus explicitly cites ninety-three classical authorities in the course of the dialogue, and only four Christian sources.⁶⁷

Yet Petrarch is not simply confronting one set of metaphysical postulates with another, in this case theological tradition with Stoicism. In fact he questions the authority to assert these postulates, on the basis of the unstable, temporal nature of experience. Of what use, then, are the classics? Precisely this: the argument of Augustinus over the evanescence of fame and the power of mortality derives its force from the eloquence and prestige of these very authors, such as Horace, whom he would have Franciscus relinquish. This is an irony of which Petrarch was all too aware. Classical writers are being remembered and cited for, paradoxically, their awareness of the vanity of fame, the weakness of human memory and the transience of all earthly things.

The classical poets and philosophers convey far better than theologians the temporal nature of human existence. They encourage Franciscus to turn toward the concrete, fluctuating experience of life, and to distrust abstract, metaphysical speculation. Franciscus achieves a deeper understanding of the empirical, historical character of his unsteady self, and so recognizes the validity of his authorities—both classical and patristic—in a way he had not fully appreciated. In the end, it is Augustinus's own humanity, and not merely his learning, that elicits Franciscus's respect for his counsel. *Humanitas* for Petrarch,

⁶⁵ Even the doctrinal Augustinus phrases his admonitions in terms of classical philosophy and psychology, of the emergent difference between recovering or neglecting one's self. See *Secretum* 1.15.2, 2.4.8, 2.8.5, 3.7.10, 3.18.5. For references in Seneca, see his *Ad Lucilium* 9.16 and 25.6, cited by Baldarotta, "Felicità, Infelicità e Sommo Bene nel *Secretum*," 111.

⁶⁶ Augustinus cites very few theological writings in the dialogue, besides his own work, and certainly no scholastic treatises. In fact his comments on contemporary instruction are scathing: see *Secretum* 1.10.2.

⁶⁷ The reckoning is mine. The ratio for Franciscus is similar [28:1], though he obviously cites fewer of both types. See Courcelle's remarks on Petrarch's notice of Augustine's classical citations, especially in the *Confessions*: "Pétrarque et Saint Augustin," 56 and n. 17 (Horace), 60 and n. 32 (Cicero).

to be fully realized, implies a wisdom rooted in an awareness of personal limitations.⁶⁸

The *Secretum* demonstrates that reading and learning are conditioned, tested and enriched by the flow of time and history, requiring readers to recollect themselves continuously toward the past as they move forward into the future. This sense of time's passing, in one's personal history as well as in the history at large, is the key aspect of Augustinus's use of the dream of Scipio, and is largely poetic and classical in nature. One's history is linear and the progress of the self is singular, individual. Nonetheless there are classical writers who have expressed this truth most convincingly, and Petrarch's acceptance of them creates circularity, a continuity across past and present and into the future. Moral learning from one's authorities becomes authentic, Petrarch suggests in the *Secretum*, when it occurs at the intersection of historically different lives: Petrarch and Augustine, and Petrarch and his reader. These crossing points should be experienced in a way that awakens the reader and makes him aware not only of his kinship with the authorities he has chosen, but also of his own divergent path. When Petrarch recalls Augustine's life, he regards it not merely as a pattern for his own, but also as a unique event, an historical event.

The dialogue between Augustinus and Franciscus emphasizes the sense of difference between counselor and counseled, confessor and penitent. Petrarch's letters, naturally but repeatedly, address the paradox that this sense of difference is at the same time the common denominator among his friendships.⁶⁹ Writing to Boccaccio, Petrarch proclaims that he and his contemporaries have also become estranged from critical features of the Latin language itself, the vehicle for communicating his life with other people and understanding their own thoughts. The features have been in "unworthy exile" and are only now, thanks to the humanists, returning to proper practice.⁷⁰ As part

⁶⁸ See Witt, *Footsteps* 278, on the "desacralization of ancient time," which permitted Petrarch to view the Romans as human, historical beings. It also extends itself to the Church Father.

⁶⁹ He wrote to the banished Severo Appennincola that, if one considers separation from one's homeland as exile, "... rari ergo non exules" *Fam.* II.3.5; continued II.4. See also II.5, II.7, IV.6.

⁷⁰ Lettera dispersa 46, in Francesco Petrarca, *Lettere disperse*, ed. Alessandro Pancheri (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1994), 354, lines 195–200: "Apud hos inquam,

of his effort to reach a shared basis of expression he often has his epistles, like the *Secretum*, employ the attributes of dialogue, creating a lively interchange of contrasting ideas and the weighing of different perspectives.⁷¹ Petrarch would adopt the dialogue form in one of his later works, the *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*, if in a more didactic way. The style of all these writings helps the reader appreciate his own relationship—historical, experiential, intellectual—to their author, since the reader also comes to know Petrarch’s singular yet intimate understanding of his chosen authorities and friends. In other Latin writings then Petrarch discusses more directly the paradoxical relation between experience and authority portrayed in the *Secretum*, and reveals the centrality of this relation for his humanism.

An essential aspect of his mission, he writes, lies in validating the examples of past virtue for his readership. In the third of a series of letters to the Dominican Giovanni Colonna, probably composed in 1342, Petrarch speaks of the bond between his readers and himself, crossing time and space, and of the appropriate use of past authority:

... I consider the reader to be of the same mind as myself. And nothing moves me more than the *exempla* of outstanding men. For they help us to rise in courage, they help the mind to experience whether it possesses anything solid, anything of excellence, unconquerable and unbreakable against fortune, or whether one has deceived oneself.⁷²

Here Petrarch explicates the two-fold relationship between experience and authority that he portrays in the *Secretum*. His reader can partake in experiences similar to his own, thereby authorizing his role as a teacher, as an *exemplum* of humanism. And both reader and he can test their experiences against that of a great figure from the past, in order to evaluate their moral character.

et quod nunc occurrit, apud Horatium, nominatim est hic ipse de quo loquor rectus: reducamus eum, oro, si possumus in medium, et nescio cur latinis finibus pulsum nomen ab indigno exilio revocare in linguam cui omne tempus impendimus, non etiam audeamus.”

⁷¹ See *Fam.* II.2.4, II.7.8–15 (to the Dominican Giovanni Colonna), III.1.10, VI.3.3–4, XVIII.5.3.

⁷² *Fam.* IV.4.3: “. . . puto lectorem eo animo esse quo cum ego. Me quidem nichil est quod moveat quantum exempla clarorum hominum. Iuvat enim assurgere, iuvat animum experiri an quicquam solidi habeat, an generosi aliquid atque adversus fortunam indomiti et infracti, an sibi de se ipse mentitus sit.” The date is recommended by Wilkins, *Petrarch’s Correspondence*, 59.

Where does that leave the Church's role, in particular the leadership of the clergy, who are, according to their station, of a spiritually different quality compared to their lay followers? We have seen that the contemporary mendicants are largely unconcerned about the crisis in the *exemplum* tradition.⁷³ In his letters, ecclesiastical differences matter little to Petrarch. At the end of his letter to his Dominican friend, he presents an *exemplum* of a reader "best-known" to Colonna, that of "wavering Augustine" (*fluctuanti Augustino*). Augustine, he writes, records in his *Confessions* how he was helped to find his way by the example of Victorinus. Petrarch cites Augustine's words: "I burned to imitate him; and indeed for this reason Simplicianus told me his story."⁷⁴ The circle of reader, author and authority is cycled back to the time of Augustine, and simultaneously forward to Petrarch's future readers. The younger, restless, less secure Augustine is different from the counsellor-confessor of Augustinus in the *Secretum*, and yet the inconsistencies of this Augustinus, we have seen, point to the appeal of the fluctuating autobiographer. Augustinus is, first of all, described by Veritas as a man experienced in the same emotions as Franciscus.

Like Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, Petrarch asks his readers to value the power of *exempla* in light of their own experience. He writes to Colonna: "Experience is the most certain teacher of things," ranking above the lives and words of those we respect.⁷⁵ Not only do past experiences of others test our self-understanding, but our experience may test their worth, informing and revising their advice. This testing or cross-evaluation both fosters a sense of one's particular historical place, and is fostered by this difference. Once again Petrarch illustrates that one's relation to the past, for the humanists, is simultaneously continuous and contingent. One's experiences are both

⁷³ As further evidence to that cited earlier, Bartolomeo in his *Ammaestramenti degli antichi* emphasizes the effectiveness of *exempla* without analyzing *how* they are effective: dist. 3 cap. 3 (pp. 39–41).

⁷⁴ *Fam.* VI.4.13: "Unum etiam nunc exemplum tibi notissimum quominus intereram, temperare nequeo. Siquidem, quem vite callem arriperet dituissime fluctuanti Augustino, et Antonii Egiptii et Victorini rethoris ac martyris profuit exemplum . . . ipsius Augustini verba tenes, octavo . . . *Confessionum* libro posita—, 'Exarsi' inquit, 'ad imitandum; ad hoc enim et ille narravit.'" The precise citation is *Confessions* 8.5.1.

⁷⁵ *Fam.* VI.4.4: "Id sane, preter experientiam que certissima magistra rerum est, nullo melius modo fit, quam si eum his quibus simillimus esse cupit, admoveam."

shared and separate. Lamenting to Guido Sette the sudden defeat of the Genoese navy in 1353, Petrarch cites Sallust, “all that rises falls, all that grows ages.” His letter, like the *Secretum*, meditates on mortality and time’s passing, and he quickly adds, “If Sallust had not said this, we know it nonetheless, yet we pretend and fool ourselves. . . .”⁷⁶ As he portays in his dialogue, experience evaluates authority, and the process of authorization becomes in turn a way of measuring self-awareness.

An essential aspect of the humanist approach to authority is the possibility of rejecting authority’s counsel, when one’s experience dictates otherwise. Petrarch justifies this rejection with characteristic self-irony in his prefatory letter to Azzo da Correggio from the *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*. Speaking of the voices dissuading him from undertaking this project, he writes:

It is rude and breeds suspicion of rashness when a new man touches upon old matters. I am discouraged by authority on the one hand and by Antiquity on the other. But the authority of yet another great and ancient author comes to my rescue: ‘For you cannot prevent a man from seeing things in that particular light in which they present themselves to him’ [Cicero, *Brutus letters* xvii,6]. These are the words of Marcus Brutus writing to Atticus, the truth of which, I believe, can hardly be surpassed. How can I judge a thing, if not in terms of what I think, unless, perhaps, I am forced to judge by someone else’s judgment; and whoever does this, does, in fact, not render his own judgment, but merely relates the judgment of another.⁷⁷

Examining experience, Petrarch asserts his originality and his independence from the classical treatment of the subject, and proclaims prosperity or good fortune a greater threat to well-being than adversity.⁷⁸ But just as Petrarch has Augustine cite Seneca’s emphasis on

⁷⁶ *Fam.* XVII.3.42: “omnia orta occidunt et aucta senescunt” [*Jug.*2.3]. Id si Salustius non dixisset, scimus tamen, sed dissimulamus et nos ipsos fallimus. . . .”

⁷⁷ *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 1:4–5. *De remediis*, 1:12: “Durum quidem, et temeritatis parata suspitio novo homini vetusta tangenti. Hinc auctoritate igitur, hinc etate permoveor; sed alterius magni cuiusdam et antiqui viri succurrit auctoritas: ‘Neque enim impetrari potest, quin quale quidque videatur ei, talem quisque de illo opinionem habeat.’ Marci Bruti verba sunt scribendi ad Atticum, quibus vix aliquid verius dici reor. Quid enim de re qualibet iudicare possum, nisi quod sentio? Nisi forte compellar ut iudicio iudicem alieno; quod qui facit, iam non ipse iudicat, sed iudicata commemorat.”

⁷⁸ *De remediis*, 1:14: Quod ut sic opiner, non me scribentium fama, non verborum laquei nodique sophismatum, sed rerum experientia viteque huius adigunt exempla

experience or Horace's view of the irreparable flight of time, so now he uses Cicero's words to support his break from authority, and to re-affirm the existential responsibility to render one's own, authentic judgment. With ironic touch he both presses his point and renders it problematic, leaving the reader to consider his claim without relying on his peculiar authority that foregoes the need for authority. Whether the reader should accept Petrarch's position falls upon the reader, not only because Petrarch and Cicero assert that his position does so—the first paradox—but also, in a second paradox, because Petrarch apparently contradicts his own independence by bringing forth Cicero as an authority for it. These lines to Azzo reveal a masterful touch at indirect address, in a way analogous to the *Decameron*, but now with the problem of authority front and center. The authority of Petrarch's voice lies in its refusal to be magisterial. While his erudition, eloquence, observation, even his very name challenge the reader to accept his sentiments, at the same time his form of address implicates the reader's own observations that alone can grant this acceptance.

We can see how qualitatively different the humanist view of authority is compared to that of the mendicants, in terms of its sceptical, experiential epistemology, which is based in turn on their conception that time qualifies the ontological. The concepts and comparisons examined in the earlier chapters therefore can now be explored from another perspective, that of the subjective evaluation of authority. Petrarch issues his most directly personal statement on his struggle with authority when describing his early years, perhaps at Avignon. He placed this statement in the first letter of the last book of the *Familiars*, a book that contains his letters to ancient Cicero, Seneca, Horace, and other classical authorities he revered. *Familiars* XXIV.1 discloses biographical insight sparked by the irrevocable passage of time.

Petrarch writes that from a young age he was always troubled by a profound sense of life's uncertainty and fragility, but that his contemporaries, both young and old, pressed him into silence:

et, magnum difficultatis argumentum, raritas." *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 1:5–6: "This opinion is based not on that of famous writers, the snares of clever words, or the tricky proofs of sophists, but on experience itself, the examples of daily life, and the scarcity of instances to the contrary."

Between me and my peers and also our elders there was this difference, that life's voyage seemed to them secure and endless, and yet to me uncertain and doubtful; and upon this point there arose frequent sermons against the arguments of youth, in which the authority of the old men prevailed and I was now suspected of foolishness [*amentie*].⁷⁹

One of Petrarch's first contests with the authorities of his age, therefore, was over his feeling for life's precariousness and temporal condition, which, he says, not only left him abandoned by his comrades, but also dissuaded him from their more conventional choices of marriage and career.⁸⁰ His sensitivity to the power of *fortuna* would only be heightened as his life progressed, especially, we have seen, after the Black Death. In his youth however his contemporaries viewed him as suffering from madness or folly [*amentia*]. This is the same charge that Augustinus voices against Franciscus in the *Secretum*.

That Petrarch finds his earlier impressions validated in the course of his life, that he believes himself vindicated in the clash with these authorities, only renders Augustinus's indictment more problematic. Petrarch describes how he overcame the first doubts raised by this confrontation, and states clearly how central the paradoxical relation between experience and authority is for the humanist enterprise he shared with Boccaccio:

It was the sense of the brevity of life, which I understood from then till now, that was affording me such great counsel, and in which, unless I am mistaken, I have found myself confirmed little by little by life itself. The difference between that time and now consists in this, that then, as I have said, I trusted in learned men; now I place my faith in these and myself and experience. Then, I looked ahead of me, from the entrance, with a doubting and uncertain mind; now, again looking

⁷⁹ *Fam.* XXIV.1.17: "Hoc inter me et coequevos meos, quin etiam senes nostros intererat, quod id ipsum illis certum et immensum, michi, ut erat, exiguum atque ambiguum videbatur; deque hoc crebri sermones et iuvenilis altercatio, in qua senum perponderat autoritas, et ego prope iam amentie suspectus eram." Petrarch continues: "Nam nec quod in animo erat exprimere noveram, et si nossem, nova etas, nova opinio parum fidei merebantur; itaque fando victus in arcem silentii confugeram; tacitis tamen ex actibus quenam essent utrorumque sententiae apparebat."

⁸⁰ *Fam.* XXIV.1.16: "... fessis itinere ac dimissis medio calle comitibus, sepe me solum circumspiciens, non sine gemitibus ad hunc diem veni"; XXIV.1.18: "Illis autem, non pueris modo sed senibus, longe spes, honorosa coniugia, laboriosa militia, anceps navigatio, avara studia instituebantur; michi—rursus in testimonium Christum voco—iam ab illa etate nulla ferme spes, iam tunc teneros cogitatus fallere incipiente fortuna." It is noteworthy that the letter is addressed to Philippe de Cabasoles, Bishop of Cavaillon, to whom he also dedicated *De vita solitaria*.

ahead and behind, I see what I have read, I experience what I suspected. . . . I need neither poets nor philosophers in this matter. I am my own witness, I am my own master authority.⁸¹

Petrarch's own relation with authority, therefore, changes over time. By reading classical writers, he began validating his first hesitant intimations about the fragility of life, in order to find support against his contemporaries. This sensibility only deepened as his experience mounted, to the point where his view of life authorizes itself.⁸² Petrarch's devotion to these writers was shaped and motivated, from the outset, by a conflict with the cultural spokesmen of his day over a central philosophical issue: the fleetingness of time. In turn his experience secured for him the wisdom of the ancients. Augustine in the *Secretum*, we have seen, not only cites classical writers to Franciscus, but also insists that he appropriate their teaching in his mode of life. The dialogue however presents the problem that no external figure, no matter how revered, has the authority to compel Franciscus into this appropriation. *Veritas* presents Augustine, yet he need not therefore directly represent *veritas*, a view that stands in contrast to the ordained sacramental understanding of his contemporary clerical confessors. The truth of Augustine's position must be recognized by a sceptical Franciscus, and by the involved reader.⁸³

Petrarch's letter is deeply retrospective, meditating on the trajectory of his life and understanding over three decades.⁸⁴ He comes

⁸¹ *Fam.* XXIV.1.22–24: “Neque vero ab re ipsa longe digredi visus eram, quando michi totum hoc intellecta iam inde vite brevitatis consilium dabat, in quo ipso, nisi fallor, aliquantulum vivendo proventus sum, tantumque inter hanc et illam etatem refert, quod tunc doctis viris, ut prefatus eram, nunc et illis et michi et experientie fidem do; tunc ante prospiciebam iam a limine dubitans incertusque animi, nunc ante retroque respiciens quod legebam video, quod suspicabar experior. . . . Non michi poete, non philosophi quidem necessarii ad hanc rem; ipse michi testis, ipse auctor ydoneus.”

⁸² One can witness, in fact, a greater deference to classical authors in the early *Rerum memorandarum*, compared to his treatment in his later writings.

⁸³ See Mazzotta (*Worlds of Petrarch*, 55–56), where he contrasts the silence of Truth with the roles of Philosophy in Boethius's *Consolation* and of Natura in Alan of Lille's *The Complaint of Nature*. Stock (*After Augustine*) notes the reader's “ethical role” in the work, for as Truth remains silent, it is the reader who “ultimately passes judgment on [Petrarch's] activities as an author” (77). I see Petrarch granting the reader the freedom and responsibility to evaluate first of all the validity of the ethical claims presented in the work, as the reader weighs the speakers' personalities and the reader's own experience.

⁸⁴ The date attributed to the letter is around 1360. See Wilkins, *Petrarch's Correspondence*, 88.

back to the relation between experience and authority at the letter's close, now using a simile to describe it:

In this matter there is nothing to add to my first judgment [of thirty years ago], unless, as I said, while earlier I trusted in learned men now I trust myself, and what I then held as opinion I now hold as knowledge. Nor did they teach this view other than by living, seeing and observing, and proclaimed it to their followers as an untrustworthy bridge they encounter on their travels.⁸⁵

The counsel of learned men is as an “untrustworthy bridge” [*male fidi pontis*] offering conveyance to their readers voyaging on life's way.⁸⁶ It can offer itself to the reader only as a proposition, and requires the weight of readers' experience if it is to be granted the solidity of knowledge. Petrarch's “learned men,” the classical writers, present perspectives that diverge from that of conventional thinking, and thus offer company to solitary wanderers, as these humanists often saw themselves. But classical counsel, no matter its promise, is also counsel dependent on its reader's witness. It contains the potentiality of truth that the pilgrim's awareness of life needs to actualize. Similar to Boccaccio's approach in his narrative of the plague, Petrarch's view of the nature of authority asks his readers to apply his scepticism to his own position, and determine its soundness by having his readers test it with their own gravity.

A key contribution of the ancients to the humanist view of authority is that they advise one only to live, look, and observe in order to know a central aspect of existence: transience and temporal nature. This advice and its paradoxical self-questioning stands in sharp contrast to the preconceptions and claims of the mendicant *ammaestra-mento*. Petrarch confirms their counsel, introducing his own experience as testimony. Readers may step only insecurely onto the support of this counsel, and determine its value by traversing it on their own individual paths.

⁸⁵ *Fam.* XXIV.1.31: “Quam in re meo veteri iudicio nichil est additum, nisi quia, ut dixi, quod doctis viris ante credideram michi iam credo, et quod opinabar scio; nam nec illi aliter quam vivendo et videndo et observando didicerunt quod velut male fidi pontis in transitu cavendum sequentibus proclamarent.”

⁸⁶ It is worth noting that Petrarch says his contemporaries ignored his youthful views because “nova etas, nova opinio parum fidei merebantur.” XXIV.1.17. See also his letter of *Fam.* I.3, where he cites Cicero, Augustine and Virgil.

Unlike Petrarch's treatment of classical wisdom, Bartolomeo da San Concordio's *Teachings of the Ancients* [*Ammaestramenti degli antichi*] consists of a florilegium of quotations from classical and ecclesiastical writers. The Dominican groups his citations under discrete and often moral categories.⁸⁷ As in other mendicant treatises, the work eclipses the personalities of the authorities and presents their counsel in fragmented, didactic portions. Bartolomeo further diminishes the subjective, experiential dimension of classical views by largely excluding poets from the collection.⁸⁸ In the *Secretum*, Augustine strongly condemns this fragmentary method of assembling the learning from past writers, and in fact he moves Franciscus to defend his own knowledge as being qualitatively deeper and more authentic than opinions gathered through book-learning.⁸⁹

Bartolomeo addresses one's relation to the ancients in a way that first qualifies but then re-affirms their authority as independent from the reader's appraisal. In his section "On Teachers" [*De' dottori*] he notes that "a teacher ought to know how to invent [*trovare*] something on his own," and not simply recite the views of others.⁹⁰ But for Bartolomeo the hierarchy of knowledge decisively limits this freedom. He is quick to add that "there is nothing blameworthy in using the sayings of others, especially by those who do not know how to invent on their own."⁹¹ In his discussion "On studying" [*Di studia*] he emphasizes the difference between teacher and student, and warns his reader against relying too much on his innate understanding of things. Since one ought not to consider oneself wise, presumably for reasons of humility, one should not trust one's own judgment, and should therefore listen to others. And the ancients, according to Cicero and Aelian, are commonly reputed wise and thus merit one's attention.⁹² True to the mendicant conception, authorities are to be read but hardly challenged; their authority is based in turn on the authority of others, and one finds not a trace of the ironic self-questioning characteristic of the humanist perspective.

⁸⁷ For example, *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, 32: dist. 3: "Delle opere che sono vie a virtudi"; 157: dist. 16: "Di dare"; 199: dist. 22: "De' peccati in generale."

⁸⁸ The references are few, for example to Horace (120, 193) and to Ovid (57).

⁸⁹ *Secretum* 1.10.7.

⁹⁰ *Ammaestramenti*, 108: dist. 10 cap. 1: "Che'l dottore dee sapere trovare da sè".

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 109: "Ma però non è da biasmare usare gli altrui detti, specialmente a chi non sa de' suoi trovare," citing Augustine and Cassiodorus.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 91: dist. 9 cap. 2; 54: dist. 3 cap. 10.

In Petrarch's own use of the Tuscan vernacular, he presents a variant perspective on the relation between experience and authority that illuminates and complements the approach in his Latin writings. If the *Secretum* treated the relation through the discourse between Augustinus and Franciscus, and his letters comment on the relation to his own authorial voice, the *Canzoniere* or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* appears to bear no reference to any authority other than his own. Yet many scholars have discussed the proximity of his vernacular poems to the Latin writings, with *canzoni* 264 and 360 showing a close affinity to the themes of the *Secretum*.⁹³

Canzone 264 begins the second section of the *Canzoniere* cycle, represented as expressing the poet's feelings after the death of his beloved Laura from the plague of 1348. In this canzone the poet confesses the power of the "two knots" [line 83: *duo nodi*], love and fame, that restrain him from achieving spiritual happiness. The later canzone 360 is placed near the end of the cycle, and shows the poet first accusing Love in the courtroom of a Queen, and then recording Love's rebuttal.

One may therefore hear in these two poems a type of confession of the poet's emotional and spiritual life, yet his mode of confession offers a variation to the form of the *Secretum*. The poetry speaks directly to the reader, and poet's thoughts are open, 'unsecreted.' In addition there is no personal authority figure, no Augustinus, who hears the poet's troubles and offers him counsel. But with the Latin work the poems share the feature of dialogue. In 264 "a thought speaks to the mind" [line 19: "L'un pensier parlar co la mente. . ."] and 360 recounts a court debate between the poet and Love. The dialogue in these poems, as in Petrarch's Latin writings, place conflicting perspectives and emotions before the reader, asking for his evaluation. The reader's feelings and experiences are brought into play, bearing the hermeneutical responsibility, since the poet confesses his weakness and his confusion.

The poems put the reader therefore into the role of the confessor; he listens immediately to the poet's distress:

⁹³ See Tateo, *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica*, 65–69; Baron, *Petrarch's "Secretum"*, 47–67; Dotti, *Secretum*, xxix–xxx, xxxvi–xliv, and textual references 225–226; and the comments by Marco Santagata in his edition of the *Canzoniere*, 5th ed. (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), 1043–1044, 1366–1381, esp. 1367.

I go about thinking, and in thinking there assails me
 a pity so strong for my plight
 that it often leads me
 to weeping differently from my normal way. . . .

[I'vo pensando, et nel penser m'assale
 una pietà sì forte di me stesso
 che mi conduce spesso
 ad altro lagrimar ch'i non soleva. . . .]

I present myself burdened with sadness
 fear and horror,
 like a man who fears death and seeks an answer.

[. . . me rappresento carco di dolore,
 di paura et d'orrore,
 quasi uom che teme morte et ragion chiede.]⁹⁴

As in the *Secretum*, and as urged by the mendicant writings, the fear of death drives the poet to self-examination. His intuition of life's finitude, which resounds in Petrarch's letters, does not resolve his inner conflict, but rather engraves it into his consciousness:

Nor do I know what space heaven gave me
 when I came newly upon the earth
 to suffer the harsh war
 that I knew to arraign against myself;
 nor can I through the body's veil
 foresee the day that cuts off my life:
 but my changing hair
 I see, and within all desires in flux.

[Né so che spazio me si desse il cielo
 quando novellamente io venni in terra
 a soffrir l'aspra guerra
 che 'ncontra me medesimo seppi ordire,
 né posso il giorno che la vita serra
 antiveder per lo corporeo velo;
 ma variarsi il pelo
 veggio, et dentro cangiarsi ogni desire.]⁹⁵

⁹⁴ *Canz.* 264.1–4, 360.6–8; *Musa*, 368 and 496. See Sir Thomas Wyatt's translation (lines 4–6): "Charged with dolour, there I me presented / With horrible fear, as one that greatly dreadeth / A wrongful death and Justice alway seeketh." *Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies, (London: J.M. Dent, 1992) §44, p. 23.

⁹⁵ *Canz.* 264.109–116; *Musa*, 372; see also 360.41–42.

The poet stresses the word *veggio* in the last line cited, bringing the reader to the poet's own private observation of his physical and emotional life, without outside or book learning.

As external authorities are absent in these two poems, apart from "the Queen" presiding over the court in *canzone* 360, scholars have seized upon this difference from the *Secretum* and claimed that the *canzoni* provide an interpretative key to Petrarch's viewpoint in the Latin work. Tateo, for example, notes that the poet in 360, accusing Love for diverting him from his higher, spiritual nature, presents arguments similar to those of Augustinus; therefore, in his view, Augustinus comes closer to Petrarch's 'true' position than Franciscus, who represents the old, unredeemed self.⁹⁶

This method of relating the *canzoni* to the *Secretum* however overlooks the irony implicit in his expression, an irony that, we have observed, puts forward an authorial perspective only to question its authority. The poet in these verses, like Franciscus in the *Secretum*, attains no final answer or resolution to his struggle. In 264 he remains inwardly divided, and in 360, even more tellingly, the Queen withholds her judgment:

And then, both [I and Love] turned to the seat of justice,
I with trembling, he with voice high and cruel,
each one of us concludes:
"Noble Lady, I await your sentence."
But she, smiling:
"It pleased me to hear your arguments,
but more time is needed for such a dispute."

[Alfin ambo conversi al guisto seggio,
i' con tremanti, ei con voci alte et crude,
ciascun per sé conchiude:
"Nobile Donna, tua sentenzaia attendo."
Ella allor, sorridente:
"Piacemi aver vostre questionii udite,
ma più tempo bisogna a tanta lite."]⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Tateo, *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica*, 65–66; he follows the observation made by Carducci in his 1899 edition of the *Canzoniere*, noted by Musa in his edition of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, 721. Baron (*Petrarch's "Secretum"*, 57–59) discusses the "near identity" of the two disputes; he also claims that the poet's self-reproach in 264.75–76, 99–101 recalls Augustinus's views in Book III, but the scholar focuses upon the dating of the respective texts (56–57).

⁹⁷ *Canz.* 360.151–157; here following Musa's translation, 505. See Wyatt's translation, *Silver Poets*, 27, lines 141–147: "At last both each for himself concluded, / I trembling, but he with small reverence: / 'Lo, thus as we have now each other

Here the poet presents three personalities, as viewed through his anguished eyes: he is trembling, Love is arrogant, and the Lady smiling. Her smile and answer sound as enigmatic and ironic as Emilia's words in the *Decameron*. She refrains from judging, and says the dispute requires "more time"—but time is precisely what the poet senses slipping by, as he approaches death! "You be the judge, who know both me and him" [line 75: "Giudica tu, che me conosci et lui"], he beseeches her in familiar terms at the close of his speech. But her judgment or teaching [*sentenzia*] is outwardly or literally the absence of judgment, casting the unhappy poet back into the temporal anxiety from which he thought, with the help of her authority, to extricate himself.

The repeated attempts by commentators to associate the Queen with Reason, and hence with Augustinus's emphasis on *ratio* in the *Secretum*, have overshadowed the more profound epistemological statement that connects these two forms, Latin and vernacular, of Petrarch's humanism.⁹⁸ Both forms leave the reader at a loss to find an authoritative response within the text to the writer's emotional and spiritual turmoil. Instead Petrarch leaves the answer to the flow of time and experience, in which the reader participates. It is the reader, and Petrarch, who must resolve the dispute, each from his own resources.

Petrarch's final poems in the *Canzoniere*, 362–366, do indeed complete a spiritual turning provoked by the poet's crisis.⁹⁹ In 364 the poet offers his penitence directly to God, without clerical intercession:

. . . my life's last moments,
High God, to you I devoutly render,
repentant and sorry for my years thus spent. . . .

[. . . le mie parti estreme,
alto Dio, a te devotamente rendo
pentito et tristo de' miei sì spesi anni. . . .]¹⁰⁰

accused, / Dear Lady, we wait only thy sentence.' / She (smiling after this said audience) / 'It liketh me,' quod she, 'to have heard your question, / But longer time doth ask resolution.'"

⁹⁸ See Tateo, *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica*, 66; Musa, *Canzoniere*, 718; Santagata, *Canzoniere*, 1367 and 1369. If the Queen is "Reason" in Augustinus's Platonic schema, dominating strength and desire, it is odd that she does not immediately agree with the poet and condemn Love's arguments.

⁹⁹ I therefore do not concur with Sturm-Maddox (*Petrarch's Laurels*, 198–229), who sees the poet at the close of the *Canzoniere* still ensnared by Laura's beauty, only now desiring to be with her in Heaven.

¹⁰⁰ *Canz.* 364.7–9; Musa, 508.

The reader, following the sequence of poems, recognizes the independence of the poet's decision. If the reader is to appropriate, inwardly, the poet's feelings and intentions, then any insight the poetry provides him originates in the reader's own independent choice, first and foremost in the reader's appraisal of the value of the poet's work.

Petrarch's work, both Latin and vernacular, therefore contests the ecclesiastical emphasis on directly imitating the wise and saintly, the *auctoritates*, and meekly submitting to their superiority. Instead his writings conceive the relationship between reader and authority as subjective, vacillating, and conditioned by history. The underlying sense of historical difference in no way undermines the authority's influence, however, but only the way the influence is exerted: it must be accepted in light of the reader's experience, and not simply through the inertia of tradition. The reader's experience not only witnesses but also is weighed by the truth conveyed by authority. The humanism of Petrarch values how one's experience and self-understanding, varying over time, sharpen or dull one's vision of the truth. His work, along with that of Boccaccio, therefore critiques the metaphysical premises of conventional moral treatises, and of classical moral philosophy as well.

This paradoxical relation between experience and authority posed problems for the Church, because preachers and confessors, even saints, undergo scrutiny by their lay audience, on whom devolves the ultimate responsibility for investing them with their influence. In the *Secretum*, Franciscus criticizes his own failings and attends to counsel in measure with his ability to present and assess Augustinus's inconsistencies. The writing places personal conscience as the arbiter of authority, and shuns a dogmatic manipulation of conscience in favor of an awareness founded on a more subtle and complete understanding of experience. That Petrarch uses the classical term *felicitas*, and not the Christian "beatitude," in naming the happiness of his Franciscus, also indicates that his experiential hermeneutic should be practiced in the humanist "revival of antiquity."¹⁰¹ In the context of our argument, the *Secretum* expresses scepticism toward Dominican moral philosophy, and Petrarch investigates the shortfall not only of this teaching but also of the way it is preached.

¹⁰¹ *Secretum* 1.3.1: "sola virtus animum felicitat" (Augustinus); 1.6.1: "interque felicem et miserum esse solent" (Franciscus).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SEA AS AN IMAGE OF TEMPORALITY

The *Secretum*, modulated by scepticism and punctuated by short-lived counsel, emphasizes in Petrarch's work the centrality of the flow of time, involving both author and reader. Scholars have commented upon Petrarch's sensitivity toward the passing of time, yet we should note the degree to which he and his contemporaries shared this concern about temporality, so that through the broader cultural context the historical and philosophical significance of the humanist sensibility more clearly emerges.¹ If temporality was not a theme that preoccupied the late-medieval scholastics,² it absorbed the attention

¹ Folena ("L'orologio del Petrarca," 4) speaks of "una concezione psicologica ed esistenziale del tempo" in Petrarch's works; Taddeo ("Petrarca e il tempo," 75) of "l'intesa partecipazione esistenziale" with the theme of time (75), but they do so without elaboration. Barolini ("The Making of a Lyric Sequence," 1) states that the "experience of the passing of time . . . concerned him most" and analyzes the formal attributes of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*Canzoniere*). Thus while Barolini shows through this formal analysis Petrarch's pre-occupation with temporality, neither she nor the other scholars discuss the contemporary cultural context or how his works engage the reader's temporal sensibility. This investigative framework reveals the thorough immersion of the humanist works in the fluctuations of mood, voice, and consciousness of self and others, an immersion conveyed by the sea-metaphor. I therefore disagree with Barolini that Petrarch's *Rime* primarily compose a method for "defeating time" (11; see also 2, 17, 29, 37), since this method itself is predicated on the awareness of time's presence and power, noticed also by Boccaccio and to a limited degree by the mendicants. Similar objections can be raised to Quinones's earlier treatment of Petrarch's view of time, for even as Quinones cites passages that show Petrarch's constant absorption in the effects of time's passing, he sees a "militancy toward time," gleaned from Seneca (*The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, 139), a way that Petrarch, by rousing himself to action, could become "oblivious to time" (149). Tripet has also noted Petrarch's involvement with time, but prefers to speak of his engagement as a spiritual struggle against the *malédiction temporelle*, which Petrarch wages by means of his conscience and memory. Like these other commentators, he overlooks Petrarch's primal recognition of how the flow of existence shapes both his moral and aesthetic perceptions (*Pétrarque*, 75, 86).

² In discussing views of temporality among Dominicans and humanists in the fourteenth century, it is useful to distinguish these views from what I am *not* discussing: the concept of *time*. If time was consistently debated by scholastic writers, from Roger Bacon to Petrus Aureoli, who stressed its unity, or from Petrus Olivi to William of Ockham, who emphasized its multiplicity or relativity, nonetheless their discussions rarely touch upon the theme of temporality. In the scholastic framework, time

of the preachers, humanists, and artists of the period, who examined temporality, especially with regard to its moral or existential ramifications. One may think here of the popular *Danse macabre* or *Totentanz*, the Dance of Death, that embraced all types of social classes. Scholastic discussions after 1300 did indeed assign a larger role to the subjective experience in measuring time.³ These discussions complemented the pastoral and often vernacular efforts of the mendicant brethren and humanists, who, perhaps motivated by the many disasters of the age, including the Black Death, were explaining to their audience the implications of the fleetingness of life. For the mendicants, temporality was a condition of moral temptation; for the humanists, an existential predicament. The humanists' orientation toward the existential aspect of temporal flux questioned the mendicant viewpoint by emphasizing the subjective, historical dimension of personal experience in a revolutionary way.⁴

We have seen how Petrarch was impressed by the vicissitudes of time since early youth in his letter of *Familiars* XXIV.1 to Philippe de Cabassoles, a letter that echoes one Petrarch placed in the first book of his collection, to Raimondo Superano [L.3]. And his opening statement of the *Familiars*, to his friend "Socrates," admits his own wandering through the scenes and changes of life. Here he compares himself to the sea-faring Ulysses, and elsewhere in the *Familiars* he praises Ulysses for his desire to learn from the varied experiences of his travels. Unlike the beguiling, over-ambitious leader condemned by Dante, Ulysses for Petrarch represents the noble individual who risks the dangers of voyaging to new destinations, in order to gain knowledge on the journey.⁵

evoked mainly an ontological problem, which they conceived in terms of the relation between time and eternal Being and First Cause.

³ Anneliese Maier, "Scholastische Diskussionen über die Wesensbestimmung der Zeit," *Scholastik* 26 (1951): 549–554; Jean LeClerq, "Zeiterfahrung und Zeitbegriff im Spätmittelalter," in *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewußtsein und Fortschrittsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter: Kölner Mediavistentagung 18*, ed. Albert Zimmermann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 7–8.

⁴ Burckhardt identified this subjective quality of Renaissance culture. *Civilization of the Renaissance*, 2:473 (VI.3). This study sharpens our understanding of this quality by placing it in a concrete historical and philosophical context, forgoing Burckhardt's association of the subjective with the secular.

⁵ *Fam.* I.1.21–22; IX.13.24–27, 28; XIII.4.10–11; XXIV.12.1. For Dante's treatment of Ulysses, see *Inferno* XXVI. See also the discussion by Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth*, trans. Anita Weston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 48.

Because of Petrarch's wanderings, his opening letter recognizes the need to vary his manner of speech according to the age and condition of his reader:

Therefore in these storms of life—so that I return to the subject—having never cast my anchor in a port for any length of time, I do not know how many genuine friends I have. . . . Thus I have had to write to many people who vary greatly in character and social place. . . .⁶

These variations stemming from time and circumstance may, Petrarch adds, suggest that he contradicts himself. Nonetheless, he calls upon his reader's own experience as witness that these oscillations are part of the nature of existence.⁷ Thinking associatively to the smaller world of his mind, Petrarch soon makes clear to Socrates that his collection will trace and analyze, as its first concern, the changes in his internal emotional life, especially after the plague of 1348.⁸ In a letter to another friend, Francesco Nelli, in 1353, Petrarch declares that the passage of time has affected his manner of writing; he feels the need to write letters more succinctly now, he says, and in a humbler and gentler style.⁹

Mendicant writers addressed the temporal aspects of human experience in a qualitatively different way. We shall explore the dimensions of the conflict between them and the humanists by comparing initially the prologue of Passavanti's *Mirror of True Penitence* with *Decameron* II.4, Boccaccio's story of the merchant Landolfo Rufolo.

Since the writings of preachers and humanists seek an emotional engagement with their lay readers and listeners, whereby the message

⁶ *Fam.* I.1.27: "In his ergo vite tempestatibus, ut ad rem redeam, nullo portu anchoram longum in tempus iaciens, quot veros amicos nescio. . . . Multis itaque multumque animo et conditione distantibus scribere contingit. . . ." Compare the efforts of Florentine rhetorician Boncompagno da Signa in the early Duecento to harmonize prose diction with the situation of one's audience: Ronald Witt, "Boncompagno and the Defense of Rhetoric," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16.1 (1986): 1–31.

⁷ *Fam.* I.1.27: ". . . tam varie ut ea nunc relegens, interdum pugnantia locutus ipse michi videar. Quod propemodum coactum me fecisse fatebitur quisquis in se simile expertus est."

⁸ *Fam.* I.1.33, 38–44.

⁹ *Fam.* XVII.11.6: "Que cum ita sint ["iam breviorque dies et mollior etas" (Virgil, *Georg.* 1.312)], et breviores deinceps epystolas et submissiorem stilem et leniores decet esse sententias; primum temporis brevitati, reliqua fatigato animo ascribes." See also his repeated references to temporality in *De otio religioso* 42.29; 90.15–16; and 94.22–25: "Quo vehementius illorum audaciam miror, qui sibi tribuere aliquid audeant in hoc cursu tam rapido, tam precipiti, tam incerto."

is communicated as much by style as by content, these writings resist a solely conceptual analysis.¹⁰ We therefore embark on an alternative course of assessment, and examine a central image in these writings: the image of the sea. This study of imagery discloses a contrast of iconography that possesses far-reaching philosophical implications. And in light of the philosophical work of G. Heath King, we may now understand how an author's metaphoric allows us to determine more surely a work's theme and purpose, and to bring into view his response to the flow of existence that underlies the conceptual statement of his writing.¹¹

The use of the sea-image by Trecento mendicants and humanists illustrates an emerging, critical difference in philosophical orientation in the early Renaissance, from the metaphysical maxims of the Preaching Order on the one hand to humanists' anti-metaphysical approach to experience on the other. Boccaccio's sea-metaphoric shows how he parodies the literature of Passavanti, yet with a philosophical aim aligned with the humanism of Petrarch.

The Dominicans use the sea-metaphor to explain a conception of the world, the *saeculum*, as an arena governed by time.¹² This association among the sea, the world, and time is equally valid for Boccaccio and Petrarch. Passavanti and other Dominicans, however, advocate a theology predicated on the possibility of withdrawing from the seductions of the world and time, as a moral act of will, akin to the monastic notion of *fuga mundi*, "the flight from the world." The humanists consider this dogma to be untenable, a flight from

¹⁰ The Preface from the *Sermones* of Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1160–1240) remarks on the difference in preaching to clerical and lay listeners: "Aliter clericis, aliter laicis est predicandum . . . quando vero in conventu et congregatione sapientium ydiomate loquimur, tunc plura dicere possumus, eo quod ad singularia non oportet descendere; laicis autem oportet quasi ad oculum et sensibilibiter omnia demonstrare, ut sit verbum predicatoris apertum et lucidum velut gemmula carbunculi," cited by Varanini in *Racconti esemplari* 2:503. By the fourteenth century, it is apparent that vernacular writings, such as the *Specchio della croce* by Cavalca, were also being read by clergy, as witnessed by the manuscript copies in monastic libraries.

¹¹ See especially his comments on the sea-image: *Existence Thought Style*, 134–143, 149–156.

¹² As noted by Hans Blumenberg, "[Humans] seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through the metaphors of the perilous sea voyage" (*Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997], 7). Unfortunately Blumenberg does not discuss either the late-medieval or early Renaissance uses of the metaphor. The sea is also an image of fortune, and the differences between Passavanti and Boccaccio on this subject are noteworthy too, but outside the scope of this analysis.

the reality of existence itself, which is conditioned by time's passing. They present a new understanding of life, in which every experience and perception is modulated by the temporal moment. If all human activity, of both body and soul, has the secular, temporal world for its mode and measure, if we are irredeemably cast onto moving waters of existence with no stable orientation, then the traditional medieval boundary between the secular—as the temporal, profane sea—and the religious—as the *terrafirma*—breaks down.

Supported by the existential value of the sea-metaphor in classical poetry and philosophy, Boccaccio and Petrarch claim no escape from the *saeculum*, no *fuga mundi*.¹³ Yet the acceptance of one's place in the temporal world need not diminish religiosity, if we understand by religiosity the piety of the self toward the Transcendent. For the humanists the conception of ontology and the self has changed: once existence is seen as inextricably conditioned by the temporal flow, all ways of thought and expression—whether metaphysical, epistemological, or moral—are consequently altered as well.¹⁴ Boccaccio and Petrarch's conception treats the mendicant teachings with scepticism, since they arrogate to themselves a standpoint of atemporal, objective certainty. By contrast the humanists' interest in classical literature, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was motivated by these writings' appreciation of temporal flux and their inherent reluctance to subject human experience to preconceived moral categories. Examining how these humanists confronted the mendicant ideas in the arena of metaphor, we witness the ways in which this clash fostered their independence from philosophical and theological convention.

The comparison undertaken here has implications for our understanding of Boccaccio's intentions in composing the *Decameron*. Scholars

¹³ One qualification is Petrarch's rhetoric to his brother Gherardo and his fellow Carthusians of their isolation from the *saeculum* in *De otio religioso*: 9.19–21 (*On Religious Leisure*, 14); 55.10–11 (*On Religious Leisure*, 81). But this rhetoric, we shall see, is attenuated by a more pervasive sense of temporality.

¹⁴ It would be interesting to analyze, in another venue, the comparison between these humanists and the anti-metaphysical tendencies in late-medieval scholasticism. See Charles Trinkaus, "The Religious Thought of the Italian Humanists," 243; and Charles H. Lohr's comments in his section on "Metaphysics" in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, 590–597. Though the relation between Trecento humanists and late-medieval scholastics such as Ockham and Nicolaus of Autrecourt has hardly been studied, we see in all these writers, in contrast to their more conventional contemporaries, a movement toward the experiential, and away from metaphysical preconceptions.

have evaluated Boccaccio's relation to scholasticism and to the "culture of penitence" advocated by the preachers, as well as concomitantly his medieval or his "secular" morality. They have also debated whether Boccaccio wrote the *Decameron* with any consistent purpose in mind.¹⁵ The analysis of the sea-metaphoric in the work addresses these issues by clarifying the philosophical perspective through which Boccaccio addressed them, especially as we place this perspective in context of the mendicant writings.

As we noted earlier, Passavanti was preacher for the Dominican Order at Santa Maria Novella in Florence, and died there in 1357. The church of Santa Maria Novella was chosen by Boccaccio as the point of departure from Florence for his ten storytellers of the *Decameron*, who were escaping the plague of 1348.¹⁶ The necrology of the convent cites Passavanti with the following words:

An exceptionally eloquent priest and preacher, who spent a great deal of time in this capacity, he was a man of great piety and zeal, restrained and continent in his actions and morals, bold and confident in speaking the truth both publicly and privately, and so expert and well-spoken in giving counsel that he was sought after by both the greater and the common citizens in difficult negotiations, and was especially renowned for this. . . .¹⁷

According to this epitaph, Passavanti lived his life true to the mission of Saint Dominic: active in the convent, but moreover engaged in the world of his urban lay congregation, addressing their concerns and habits through the teachings of the Church.¹⁸

¹⁵ Robert Hollander's "The Proem of the *Decameron*" in *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, 92 summarizes the differing views of the *Decameron*'s moral purpose. Carlo Delcorno discusses the "culture of penitence" in his "Modelli agiografici e modelli narrativi, Tra Cavalca e Boccaccio." For the difficulty of reconciling consistency with variety in the work, see Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 152; and Teodolinda Barolini, "Giovanni Boccaccio," 2:526.

¹⁶ Mulchahey calls Boccaccio a "cross-town rival" to Passavanti, even though both criticized preachers for their failings ("*First the Bow is Bent in Study*", 418).

¹⁷ Stefano Orlandi, O.P., *Necrologio di Santa Maria Novella* (Florence: Olshki, 1955), 1, 88–89; cited by Varanini, *Racconti esemplari*, 2:499–500: "Sacerdos et predicator supra modum facundus et in hoc actu magno tempore occupatus, fuit vir magne religionis et zeli, et in suis actibus et moribus circumcisus et continens, audax et securus in veritate dicendi in publico et in privato, tam expertus et dictus in consiliis dandis ut a maioribus et pluribus civibus esset in arduis consiliis requisitus, et in hoc singulariter nominatus [. . .]."

¹⁸ See Daniel Lesnick's remarks on Passavanti in *Preaching in Medieval Florence*, 101–102 and more recently Mulchahey, "*First the Bow is Bent in Study*", 185–188, 405–410, 416–418, and especially on the *Specchio*, 446–447, 470.

The *Mirror of True Penitence*, left unfinished at his death, was based on his Lenten sermons of 1354.¹⁹ It is from the prologue to his *Mirror of True Penitence* that we may best observe his use of the sea-image and establish a close relationship to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in particular to his story of Landolfo Rufolo of the second day's tales.²⁰

Passavanti's *Mirror* begins with an extended deliberation on a dictum of Saint Jerome: "Poenitentia est secunda tabula post naufragium." This is an opening line found in at least one other contemporary manual of penitence, and the image was well-known to medieval theologians and his fellow Dominican Taddeo Dini.²¹ Passavanti translates this dictum as "la penitenzia è la seconda tavola dopo il pericolo della nave rotta": "penitence is the second *tavola*—board, tablet—after the peril of shipwreck." He writes:

¹⁹ The *Specchio* has been treated by scholars as an important work of vernacular prose, though no one, with the recent exception of Mulchahey, has studied its importance in a cultural-historical context. See especially Giovanni Getto, "Umanità e stile di Iacopo Passavanti"; and the references in Varanini, *Racconti esemplari*, 2:505.

²⁰ Although the *Decameron* has been dated to the years 1349–51 (see Teodolinda Barolini, "Giovanni Boccaccio" II.518), hence prior to the *Specchio*'s date of 1357, both the *Specchio*'s reliance on earlier sermons and the prevalence of the image of the shipwreck (see note below) make it plausible that the *Decameron* was engaging in parody of a motif familiar to Florentines who attended mendicant sermons.

²¹ An *incipit* of the *Summa de poenitentia* (Paris, lat. 14927, cc. 175^r–176^v); cited by Varanini, 506. The image appears, in various formulations, at least six times in the writings of St. Jerome: ep. 77, 6 (*Epistulae*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, CSEL 55 [Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996], 42, lines 25–26); ep. 84, 6 (*ibid.*, 128, lines 5–6); ep. 117, 3 (*ibid.*, 425, line 14); ep. 130, 9 (*Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, Vienna 1996 [CSEL 56.1], 189, lines 4–5); *Comm. in Esaiam* 3,9 (edited by M. Adriaen, CCSL 73 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1963], 51, lines 21–23); *Comm. in Hiezech.* 16,52 (edited by F. Glorie, CCSL 75 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1964], 207, lines 713–714) as well as Tertullian *De poenitentia*, c.4 (in *Opera catholica*, edited by E. Dekkers, J.G.P. Borleffs, R. Willems, R.F. Refoulé, G.F. Diercks, and A. Kroymann, CCSL 1 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1954], 326, lines 9–12). For earlier medieval authors, see Rabanus Maurus, *Commentariorum in Ezechielem liber 7* (PL 110, col. 690A), Odo of Cluny, *Collationum liber 2* (PL 133, col. 577B) and Peter Damian, *sermo 63* (in *Sermones*, ed. Giovanni Lucchesi, CCCM 57 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1983], 372, lines 391–392). Beginning in the twelfth century it was common enough to appear in the writings of Gratian, Peter Lombard and Alan of Lille: see Gratian, *Decretum*, pars 2 causa 33 (Tractatus de Penitencia) quaestio 3 distinctio 1 can. 72 in *Corpus iuris canonici*, vol. 1, ed. Emil Friedberg (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1879), col. 1179; Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, vol. 2 (Rome: Ad Claras Aquas, 1981), liber 4, distinctio 14, cap. 1, p. 315; Alan of Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, caput 30 (PL 210, col. 170C; trans. in *The Art of Preaching*, trans. Gillian R. Evans [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981], 120); *De fide catholica contra haereticos sui temporis liber 1*, caput 48 (PL 210, col. 353C–353D), *De sacra theologia*, regula 112 (PL 210, col. 680B), *Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicarum* (PL 210, col. 965D).

The blessed doctor speaks of penitence by similitude to those who fall into the sea. And it often happens that, after the ship has capsized by 'great fortune' or the storms which arise on the sea, those sailors who are more quick-witted seize one of the boards of the broken ship, and clinging firmly to it, float on the water and are not submerged. Instead they gain the shore or harbor and are rescued from the danger of the storm-tossed sea.²²

Passavanti proceeds to interpret the likeness for his listeners. "This world," he explains, is called the sea "on account of its continual movement and unstable state."²³ And in this world, to quote further, "on this perilous sea, all drown unless rescued by help of divine grace," just as Christ reached out and saved Peter from drowning [Matthew 14:31]. The first means of rescue offered humanity is what he calls "the light and steadfast ship" of baptismal innocence, which can "carry those healthy and saved who persevere within to the harbor of eternal life, as true and righteous Christians."²⁴

As the likeness indicates, this voyage through the dangerous, unstable world is normally upset. Passavanti provides a list of reasons: negligence, vanity, ignorance, desire, or many moral failings. So too, he says, ships at sea are wrecked by contrary winds, currents, seaswells,

For the writers contemporary with Passavanti, it also is mentioned by Taddeo Dini in his sermons and constitutes a motif in the collection of *Miracoli* of the Virgin. See Dini, sermons 46v: "Ago penitentiam in favilla et cinem. Job ult. Job dicit quod penitentia est secunda tabula post naufragium et ideo sicut nauta perit nisi tabulae beneficio substituetur, sic homo vadens per mar[em] presentis seculi procellosum in navi conscientie. . . ."; *Miracoli della gloriosa Vergine Maria*, Cap. LXXIII (a), in which a pirate floats five days upon a table (*tavola*) before the Virgin appears to him and receives his confession.

²² Passavanti, *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 1: "Parla il santo dottore della penitenza, per somiglianza di coloro che rompono in mare, de' quali spesse volte interviene che, rotta la nave per grande fortuna e per tempestate che sia commossa in mare, coloro che sono più occorti predono alcuna delle tavole della rotta nave, alla quale attengendosi fortemente, soprastando all'acqua, non affondano; ma giungono al rivo o al porto, iscampati del periglio del tempestoso mare."

²³ *Loc. cit.*: ". . . questo mondo, il quale è appellato mare per lo continuo movimento e inistabile istato. . . ."

²⁴ *Specchio*, 2: ". . . in questo periglioso mare ogni gente aneiga se l'aiuto della divina grazia non lo soccorre; la quale ha provveduto, per iscampo della gente umana, d'una navicella lieve e salda. . . . Questa navicella è la innocenzia battismale. . . . E se si conduce e si guida bene, porta sani e salvi al porto di vita eterna coloro che dentro vi perseverano, siccome veri e diritti cristiani." Examples of these who transport themselves unscathed through the world, according to Passavanti, are the Virgin and John the Baptist, two saints popular among his Florentine audience.

whirlpools, “the obscurity of the darkest night,” pirates, indeed by “the terror of wild beasts” and “the sweet song of charming sirens.”²⁵

Weighed down by his vices and sins, which have shattered his baptismal innocence, “man is sent deep, abandoned and naked in the midst of the stormy sea, without hope of any aid.” The aid, of course, now comes in the form of penitence, the second board, which he may grab after this shipwreck, “before”—as he puts it—“the waves of the sea drag him under.”

Although grace is offered to the Christian in the sacrament of penance, the preacher Passavanti stresses the need to turn one’s heart to receive and take hold of it. One must move quickly and decisively: “just as one must, without delay, seize the remedy of penitence,” he writes, “so too one must hold on with perseverance.” Passavanti equates the board, the *tavola* of penitence, with the *lignum vitae*, the tree of life, and adds that it was signified by the tablet—*tavola*—attached to the wood of the Cross.²⁶ Since we are, he says, “fallen into the deepest part of the uncertain and worrisome sea of the world, doused in mortal sin,” we must “extend our hand and take this necessary and triumphal board of penitence, and hold steadfastly to it, until it conducts us to the shore of the celestial kingdom to which we are called.”²⁷ The sea-image thus conveys for the

²⁵ *Specchio*, 3: “per oscurità di tenebrosa notte, o per ispaventamento delle fiere bestie, o per lo dolce canto delle sirene vaghe. . . .” We see in the last two dangers especially a moral warning against undertaking sea voyages that may in fact be designed to discourage exploration. In this respect Boccaccio and Petrarch’s use of the sea-metaphor, shorn of its moral implications, accorded better with the ambitions and actual experiences of Italian merchants and adventurers. See Boccaccio’s account of a 1341 encounter of Europeans with inhabitants of the Canary Islands: “De Canaria et de insulis reliquis ultra Hispaniam in oceano noviter repertis” in *Monumenti di un manoscritto autografo e lettere inedite di messer Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Sebastiano Ciampi (Milan: Molina, 1830), 55–63.

²⁶ *Specchio*, 4–5: “. . . anzi rimane l’uomo così nabissato, abbandonato e ‘ngnudo nel mezzo del tempestoso mare, senza speranza di ognuno buono soccorso. . . innanzi che l’onde del mare lo traportino. . . E come dee tosto, senza indugio, il rimedio della penitenzia prendere, così la [tavola] dee con perseveranza tenere. E di ciò parla la santa Iscrittura, che dice: *Lignum vitae est his qui apprehenderent eam, et qui tenuerit eam, beatus*: Ella, cioè la penitenzia, è legno di vita a chi la prende; e chi la terrà, sarà beato. . . . Onde forse fu significata per quella tavola la qual fu sopraposta al legno della croce. . . .”

²⁷ *Specchio*, 5–6: “. . . [Noi siamo] ma caduti nel mezzo del profondo pelago del dubitoso e angoscioso mare del mondo, e nabissati nel peccato mortale. . . . stendiamo le mani a pigliare questa necessaria e vittoriosa tavola della penitenzia, e perseverantemente la tengamo, fino ch’ ella ci conduca alla riva del celestiale regno, al quale siamo chiamati. . . .”

Dominican a person's ability and responsibility to determine the course of his moral life, and he emphasizes that we must escape from our immoral sea and temporal seductions as we would keep high and dry, and placed on solid ground.²⁸

In his Latin *Sermones de tempore* Passavanti speaks even more forcefully about the choice facing the Christian between the sinful transience of the *saeculum* and the eternal permanence found in the Church. Addressing perhaps his fellow friars, he says: "The world is in motion and also its desire. For you will either love temporal things and move in a temporal fashion. Or love Christ and we shall live in eternity. But it is better to choose that we live with the Lord in eternity and let go of this temporal world."²⁹

The image of sea and water was explicated in its broader doctrinal connotations by Passavanti's Dominican brother, Giovanni da San Gimignano. He compiled two manuals for preachers, one consisting of funeral sermons, the other entitled a *Summa of the Exemplary Nature and Similitudes of Things*. The *Summa* is a compilation of symbols and their moral meanings, as viewed by Giovanni and his order in the early Trecento. Giovanni justifies interpreting the sea and other natural phenomena in a moral framework by claiming that the created natural world is the "extrinsic exemplar" for our moral life, as Christ is its "intrinsic exemplar."

Unde et oculorum visio est mihi mentis eruditio.

[Hence the vision of my eyes is the learning for my mind]

His writings are therefore critical for fleshing out, through a study of its metaphoric, the relation between the mendicants and their humanist contemporaries.³⁰

²⁸ Passavanti makes it clear through his reference to perseverance that people must choose to co-operate within divine help. God is our celestial *padrone*, he writes (3): "Il governo e la cura del movimento, e 'l conducimento della detta navicella, il celestiale padrone Iddio in alcuno modo, tanto quanto si stende la potenza e la facultade del libero arbitrio, commette e lascia all' uomo, e fal nocchiere quando è venuto agli anni di tale discrezione che possa e sappia e possa volere, col remo in mano . . . durare fatica nella guardia e nella condotta di si nobile vasello in che Iddio l'ha allogato e messo."

²⁹ *Sermones de tempore*, Munich Clm 13580, ff. 145^{rb}–145^{va}. "Mundus transit et concupiscentia eius. Quod vis utrum amare temporalia et transire cum tempore. Aut christum amare et in eternum vivemus. Sed melius est eligere ut cum domino in eternum/vivemus et transeuntem mundum relinquemus." One can also consider the iconography of the fresco of the Church Militant in the Capella degli Spagnoli in Santa Maria Novella, painted by Andrea di Bonaaiuto in the 1360's: the Dominican path to salvation is portrayed underneath the Navicella in the vault.

³⁰ *Summa de exemplis* (afterwards *S.ex.*), Prologus, 3r–3v: Christ is "exemplar intrin-

Giovanni supports Passavanti's urgent voluntarism by presenting a more elaborate set of interpretations of the sea-image. His collection of symbols reveals the vast horizontal network of associations a single image may possess. For in addition to connoting the secular world, the sea-image is more generally related to the symbolism of water, sin, and feminine nature, and thus the vacillation of emotion.

As did Passavanti, Giovanni describes the life-journey as a voyage "across the sea of the world." Although the sea embodies "the vicissitude and mutability of the world," a quality understood by both Dominicans and humanists alike, Giovanni stresses its significance on a spiritual level.³¹ The sea in this context represents "the bitterness of life," and particularly "the restlessness of the sinner."³² The Christian journey should therefore be guided by "true and constant faith . . . lest the voyagers perish by wandering off in the darkness of ignorance and disbelief."³³ This tenebrous errancy and instability is also characteristic of sin itself. "The very state of sin," he writes, "has a watery nature, because it runs the danger of overflow, is disturbed by its fluctuation, and is unstable by its movements. . . . Water is our flesh or the desire of it, uncontained and flowing."³⁴ The world in fact is the sea of seven sins, "swollen in its pride, bluish [*lividum*] in its envy, impetuous in its wrath, deep in its greed, restless in its sloth, foaming in its lust, devouring in its gluttony as the bigger fish eats the littler. . . ."³⁵

secus existens in corde per fidem, sc. Christi vita" compared to "exemplar extrinsecus, scil. natura creata rerum quae sunt extra animam." Giovanni draws a parallel here to "operibus artium," where the "interior" exemplar is the "forma artis" and the "exterior" is the apprentice's obedience to his master: "Sed quemadmodum in operibus artium, sic etiam in moribus et actibus virtutum duplex habemus exemplum."

³¹ *S.ex.*, 1.34: ". . . fides vera et constans dirigit navigantes per mare mundi. . . . ; 1.48: "Tertio modo vocatur mare mundi vicissitudo sive mutabilitas. . . ."

³² *S.ex.* 1.48: "Nam uno modo dicitur mare huius vite amaritudo. . . . Secundo modo mare vocatur peccatorum inquietudo. . . ."

³³ *S.ex.*, 1.34: ". . . fides vera et constans dirigit navigantes per mare mundi. . . . Est etiam fides viatorum directio: ne in tenebris ignorantie vel infidelitatis exorbitando pereant." Giovanni connects faith and knowledge, according to Dominican tradition. See also *S.ex.* 1.51: ". . . mundus assimilatur mundi . . . [propter] defectum navis. Navis enim est lignum cum quod habemus transire hoc mare: est hoc corpus quod est vas fragile. . . . Item est frequenter defectus naute periti id est rationis prudenter regentis." Another related image is that of Mary, "the blessed Virgin," who "nos dirigit sicut stella maris dirigit navigantes" (*S.ex.* 7.4).

³⁴ *S.ex.* 6.52: "Similiter status peccati habet naturam aque; quia inundatione periculosus: fluctuatione turbidus et motibus instabilis." *Sermones funebres* (afterwards *S.fun.*) d.5.s.9: "Aqua est caro nostra sive ipsius concupiscentia: que incontinens et fluidilis est."

³⁵ *S.ex.* 7.21: "Est enim mundus mare tumidum per superbiam: lividum per

The sea of the world, or the *mundus defluens*, the world of flowing transience, is a treacherous place that one does best to avoid. If corporal and sinful flux are found in the waters of the sea, the Christian may, with clerical guidance, gain stability in the soul through God.³⁶ Like Passavanti, Giovanni maintains that the undulant, mutable nature of worldly life can be escaped through the sacrament of penance. The Christian “should rush and flee to penitence” as to a sanctuary away from the state of sin and the world, which is “an unguarded, unwatched place [“locus . . . non tutus”].”³⁷ The sea bears a second reference to the purpose of penitence, Giovanni claims, because it can be confined; limits can be prescribed for it. The sea cannot progress beyond its shores; like all liquids, it cannot easily restrain itself or bring itself to rest, but must be bounded by something external to it.³⁸ And the guardian of penance and coastguard of the sea of human frailty is the clergy. It was the practice of the Dominicans, as we see with Passavanti, to urge their lay congregations to observe the penitential rituals of the Church, which they administered. In the words of Giovanni, the “regimen of prelates” are like those that live upon the seacoasts, the *terrafirma*, and watch for shipwreck.³⁹

invidiam: fervidum per iracundiam: profundum per avariciam: inquietum per accidiam: spumoso per luxuriam: absorbens per castrimargiam ubi etiam maior piscis minores devorat. . . .” See also Bartolomeo da Pisa’s *De conformitate vitae Beati Francisci*, 5:199, where the sea connotes the bitter, unstable, deep, and dangerous realm of temptation.

³⁶ *S.fun.* d.2, c.8: “Requiritur enim stabilitas non solum ex parte operis ut fiat opus firmum et stabile. Sicut est quod fit in anima non in corpe corruptibili: et quod fit pro deo et non pro mundo defluente. . . .” Giovanni also makes explicit the long-standing association of sea and fortune. With its variable nature, the sea follows the changes of the moon, just as the world follows the whim of fortune [*S.ex.* 1.51]. This association helps to explain Boccaccio’s use of the sea-voyage as a plot device in nearly half of his stories in Day II, stories that tell of people who recover from the shifts of fortune.

³⁷ *S.fun.*, d.2, c.7: “Locus autem non tutus est mundus vel status peccati: in quo homo stat semper in periculo. . . . Et ideo debet homo festinare et fugere ad poenitentiam ut fugiat a statu peccati antequam mors superveniat: et fugere ad statum tutiorem scilicet gratie dei in quo salvetur. . . .”

³⁸ *S.ex.* 1.60: “Penitentia assimilatur mari. . . . 5. [quia] mare non est ultra sua litora progressivum: quia licet sit liquidem quod per se non bene terminatur et sistitur: tamen ben terminatur per aliud.” These last references, in which penitence is first separate from, then related to the sea, show how Giovanni is not interested in a strict logical consistency of in his study of the metaphor; what is important is the underlying connotation of the sea’s internal flux that requires external, religious definition.

³⁹ *S.ex.* 8.61, regarding the “prelatorum regimen”: “. . . prelatus debet diligenter custodire gregem suam . . . alioquin reus efficitur. unde prelati in hoc similes sunt

The Dominicans understood the sea's unsteadiness as characteristic of femininity, which was a source of danger for both sexes and called upon religious vigilance. One should avoid the company of the wicked, Giovanni says, at any physical cost; for Joseph fled the seduction of Potiphar's wife, leaving behind his cloak, and one escapes, naked if necessary, from the hazards of the sea.⁴⁰ Paintings by Bicci di Lorenzo from the late Trecento and by Giovanni di Paolo, a Quattrocento Siennese artist, dramatically convey this moral view of the sea's feminine nature. Their paintings show St. Nicholas of Bari or the fourteenth-century Augustinian Nicholas of Tolentino rescuing shipwrecked sailors at night. In the ocean underneath the demasted ship is a sea-monster in the form of a siren (see figures 1 and 2).⁴¹ Perhaps the artists or their patrons had heard of the idea expressed by Passavanti in one of his sermons. Passavanti notes that sirens are often responsible for shipwreck; in a spiritual sense they represent death on account of their feminine image, and "death is of a feminine origin."⁴²

illis qui habitant in litoribus maris; quia secundum leges non si inveniatur quod rapuit res ex naufragio. . . ." In a variation on this sense of religious solid ground, he states that the religious are as dead to the world as the corpses naturally cast ashore by the sea: *S.ex.* 10.47: "Item quod [religiosus] est mortuus mundo oditur et eiicitur a mundo. Nam sicut mortua corpore mare a se expellit: viva vero sibi retinet. Sic mundus detinet suos amatores tanquam sibi viventes: et eiicit contemptores tanquam sibi defunctos. . . ." In the *Secretum*, Petrarch has Augustine use the same contrast between coast and sea when urging Franciscus to possess inner tranquillity to life's distress: "Itaque velut insitens sicco litori tutus, aliorum naufragium spectabis et miserabiles fluitantium voces tacitus excipies; quantum ve tibi turbidem spectaculum compassionis attulerit, tantum gaudii afferet proprie sortis, alienis periculis collata, securitas" [2.16.13]. Cf. Augustine's *Contra acad.* II.1.1 (PL 32, c. 919) where he talks of the "philosophiae tutissimus jucundissimusque portus."

⁴⁰ *S.ex.* 10.73: "Joseph relicto pallio in manu femine fugit. Et homo de periculo maris libenter nudis evadit."

⁴¹ The painting by Bicci di Lorenzo dates from the end of the Trecento and is currently in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Giovanni di Paolo's work is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson collection, inv. 723. The painting is given the date of 1457 and is based upon the story told by the survivors. Nicholas of Tolentino died in 1306.

⁴² *Sermones* f.13rb: "Quod syrena piscis decipit hominem in cantu et dum sentit homines requiescentes preminia dulcedine cantus mittit navem et omnes occidit. Et solum evadunt qui clauserunt aures ne audierunt. Ita spiritualiter dum preminia dulcedine rerum temporalium requietarum [est] mors qui intelligitur per syrenam quae ymaginem femineam habet. Et mors est generis feminini mittit in eum et occidit. Solum qui clauserunt aures suas et praecipue noluerunt temporales delectationes evasuerunt amorte [sic] eterna." Passavanti cites Aristotle's *De animalibus* as his source of information on sirens, and is elaborating on Luke 12:19.

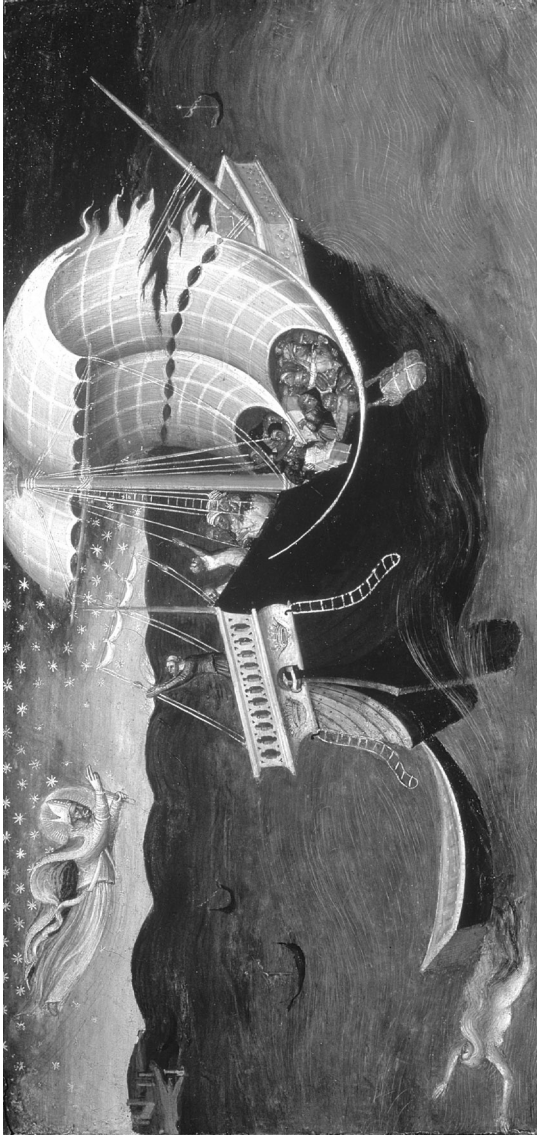


Fig. 1. Bicci di Lorenzo (1373–1452), *St. Nicholas of Bari Rebuking the Tempest*. Originally painted for S. Niccolo in Caffaggio, Florence. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, U.K./Bridgeman Art Library.

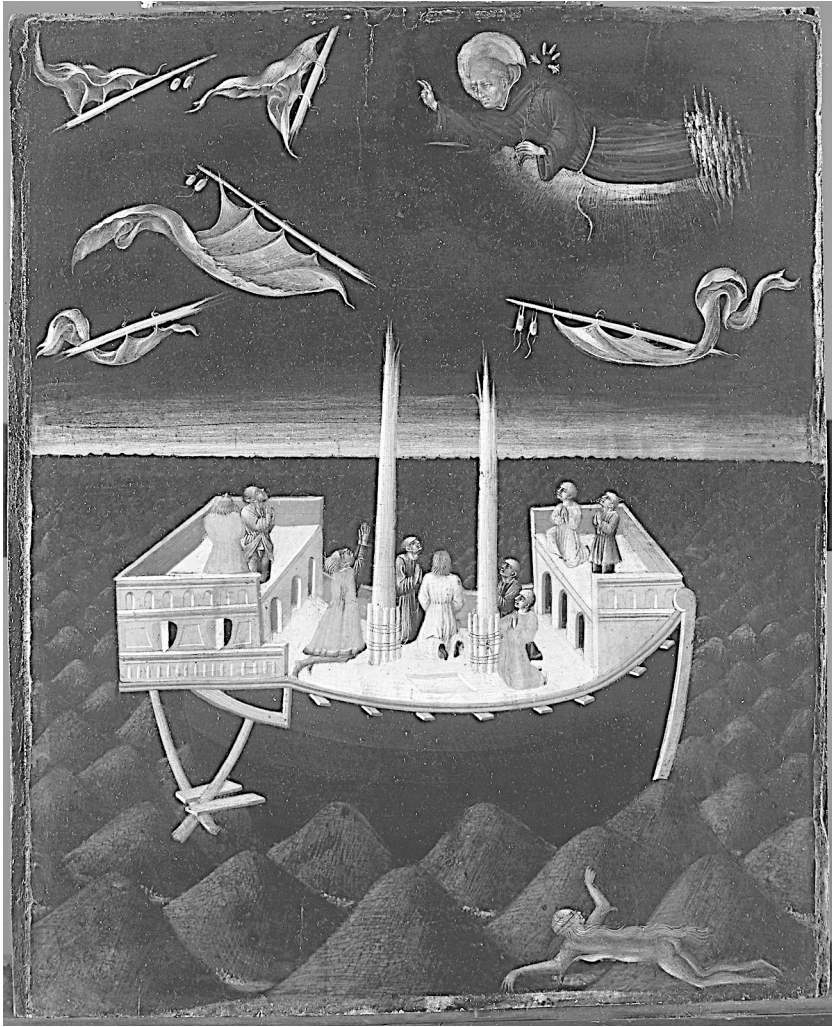


Fig. 2. Giovanni di Paolo (c. 1403–1482), *St. Nicholas of Tolentino Saving a Ship* (1457) Philadelphia Museum of Art: John G. Johnson Collection, 1917, inv. 723.

The sea symbolizes for the mendicants that secular life is essentially imperiled and corrupt, and Giovanni finds this meaning confirmed in that “man is born from woman, a fragile and frail thing.”⁴³ The sinful soul is in fact like a woman, because “a woman possesses inconstancy and fickleness of mind. And similarly the sinful soul is inconstant toward goodness and movable and weak toward wickedness.”⁴⁴ Even the more positive moral assessments of the sea and of femininity share a common limitation. Just as Giovanni relates the sea to penitence because it can be controlled, so too, in his funeral sermon for a nun, he praises the religious woman for strengthening her natural fragility in body and soul through her cloisteral confines, with the strong hard walls of continence and spiritual virtues.⁴⁵ These sentiments help explain not only the assistance the mendicants provided to the lay women who sought the virtues of confinement, but also the general social opprobrium in the Trecento against women who conversed too freely and independently.⁴⁶

Thus Giovanni, like Passavanti, uses the sea-metaphor in order to warn his listeners and readers against the dangers of life’s mutable nature and move them to choose life’s ordering principle from the

⁴³ *S.fun.* 1.2: “De multiplici defectu humane vite”: “Dico ergo quod primo ostenditur humane vite per incipium esse debile et putridum: quia homo natus est de muliere: quod est res fragilis et debilis.”

⁴⁴ *S.ex.* 6.7: “anima peccatrix assimilatur mulieri. I . . . mulier habet mentis inconstantiam et mobilitatem. et similiter anima peccatrix est incontans in bono et mobile et labile ad malem.” There are in this section fifteen connotations of femininity with the *anima peccatrix*, three associations with the *anima sancta*. See in this context the famous words of Filomena in *Decameron* Intro. 74: “Ricordovi che noi [donne] siamo tutte femine, e non ce n’ha niuna sí fanciulla, che non possa ben conoscere come le femine sien ragionate insieme e senza la provedenza d’alcuno uomo si sappiano regolare. Noi siamo mobile, riottose, sospettose, pusillanime e paurose. . . .” As we shall explore in the next chapter, Boccaccio treats Giovanni’s sentiment with irony by having Filomena speak so forthrightly and straightforwardly, in the Dominican church which the women are about to leave. The men who end up accompanying them are hardly models of piety.

⁴⁵ *S.fun.* 5.13: “In funere alicuius religiose mulieris”: “Circa primum attendendum est quod illa secundum naturam fuit mulier fragilis: sed tamen secundum naturam nos videmus quod ea que de se sunt valde fragilia et passibilia muniuntur et fortificantur ex circumpositione alicuius rei fortis vel dure. . . . Sic bona quelibet et religiosa soror quamvis secundum naturam sit tantum animo quam corpore fragilis fortificantur tamen robore continentie et cuiuslibet spiritualis virtutis.”

⁴⁶ On women’s pursuit of *immuratio*, see Benvenuti Papi, “*In Castro Poenitentiae*”. We have seen that Boccaccio has Pampinea at the end of the first day’s tales criticize women’s license in speech: 1.10.4; see also Filomena in VI.1.2. In his later *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio in his own voice warns parents against over-indulging their daughters’ desires for freedom: *Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2001), IX.3, L.5.

resources of Church authority, which stands unshakable, on the ground. Boccaccio charts a different course for his readers in the *Decameron*. At the very beginning of his work, he expresses compassion for the confined lifestyle of his women readers, seeing this enclosure as a cause of their unhappiness.⁴⁷ His seven women narrators depart for the open countryside prior to their storytelling, leaving the Dominican oversight at Santa Maria Novella, where Passavanti preached. And in the story of Landolfo Rufolo, told by Lauretta, the sea denies its dogmatic limitations, and casts scepticism on the land-loving clergy.

The tale of Landolfo Rufolo, a merchant from Ravello on the Amalfi coast, is told in accordance with the theme of the second day's storytelling. This theme concerns those "who, hindered by diverse things, achieve an un hoped-for happiness."⁴⁸ Given the understanding of the sea's unpredictable, fortuitous power, it is not surprising that seven of the day's ten stories involve sea-crossings, and in four of these stories there is at least one major accident at sea. Lauretta's story is the first of these four that engage the ocean's perilous possibilities, and it is the one closely modeled on the metaphor expounded by Passavanti.

Landolfo Rufolo is a proud, ambitious man, who turns to piracy in order to amass a fortune double the one he had previously lost in a risky business venture. Just at the point of his success, his ship and its goods are seized by Genoese traders and Landolfo is taken prisoner. The Genoese ship, however, runs aground in a tempest near Ionia; Landolfo is cast out into the waters, "in darkest night, with the sea high and swelling"⁴⁹

Landolfo, who had first wished to die rather than return home in shame, now changes his mind as he stares death in the face. He had become very frightened, and "like the other sailors took hold of a board [*una tavola*] that he could reach, so that perhaps God, who delayed his drowning, might send him some means for his rescue"⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Proem.10–12.

⁴⁸ I.Concl.11: "... chi, da diverse cose infestato, sia oltre alla speranza riuscito a lieto fine."

⁴⁹ II.4.17: "... quantunque obscurissima notte fosse e il mare grossissimo e gonfiato ..."

⁵⁰ II.4.18: "... e, come gli altri, venutagli alle mani una tavola, a quella s'apiccò, se forse Idio, indugiando egli l'affogare, gli mandasse qualche aiuto allo scampo suo ..."

At this point Lauretta's tale enters the semantic field of Passavanti's metaphor. Landolfo has grasped a *tavola*, a board, as a means of escaping death after his shipwreck, and he beseeches God's mercy to make it to dry land, just as the Christian, according to the Dominican, grabs hold of the board of penitence and prays to complete his life's course with the aid of God's grace. If the story ended here, it would be an artistic recounting of the mendicants' moral lesson. And the tale, in fact, would still harmonize with the theme of the day's storytelling. But there are surprises in store for Landolfo and Lauretta's readers.

After the night's storm, Landolfo discovers he is further out to sea than ever before: all he sights are sea and clouds. To make matters worse for him in his isolation and disorientation, a chest or trunk [*una cassa*] bobs over the waves so close to him that he fears it will knock him off the board and under water once more. And so it happens: a blast of wind courses over the sea, pushing the chest against the plank, and Landolfo is sent under. When he surfaces, he now clutches the chest as the object close at hand; the board is far away. Clinging for dear life to this chest, he is "cast about by the sea. . . . without knowing where he was or seeing anything but the ocean about him".⁵¹

The next day—be it "by God's pleasure or force of wind"—Landolfo and his trunk near the coast of Corfu. There a poor washerwoman spots him from shore. She pulls him from the water and restores him to his senses. She also returns the chest to him. Landolfo discovers, to his great delight, that it contains a sack filled with precious stones. The merchant "praised God once again for not having abandoned him."⁵² And so he returns home, as he had first intended, twice as rich as when he set out.

How does one decipher the tale's *denouement*, in the context of the metaphor presented by Passavanti? Let us consider three new elements in Lauretta's narrative: the loss of the *tavola* or board; the washerwoman of Corfu; and her descriptions of the sea-scape as the setting for the action of the story.

⁵¹ II.4.21: "... gittato dal mare ora in qua e ora in là ... senza sapere ove si fosse o vedere altro che mare ..."

⁵² II.4.22, 26: "... o piacere di Dio o forza di vento che 'l facesse ..."; "... lodando Idio che ancora abbandonare non l'aveva voluto ..."

Landolfo loses his hold on the board, due to his collision with the chest. He views this at the time as a new disaster. Lauretta emphasizes that he exerted himself with all his strength to keep the chest away from him.⁵³ If one considers that the board is the plank of penitence described by Jerome and expounded by Passavanti, then the tale may be read as Boccaccio's parody of the mendicant theme of penitential emergency. This parody thus poses the question whether the tradition of penitence is necessary for the salvation of those shipwrecked in the waters of life. For the plank only brings Landolfo farther from shore, and he is saved by the chest, the very object that endangered him and the plank. He is rescued contrary to his expectations and in fact succeeds in the end in the original aim of his journey.

If Passavanti's prologue was only another moral tale, it would confirm our earlier observation that Boccaccio explodes the universal, paradigmatic quality of the medieval *exemplum*, by introducing narrative realism.⁵⁴ Yet Passavanti's episode holds a more prominent position in didactic literature, standing at the entrance to an entire treatise on penitence, and grounded in the authority of Jerome. And the sea-metaphor, we have observed, reveals these writers' relation to the temporal flow of existence. Therefore Boccaccio's parody of the Prologue, beyond its shift in literary genre, has deeper consequences for the moral program of the friars.

The Dominicans' use of the sea-metaphor attempts to impress a sense of security, through the means of the Church, upon the exigencies of moral life. But Landolfo loses the board, the Church's symbol of safety, while on the high seas, and still he comes to shore. Is it possible that the mendicants interpret the sea-image itself within too narrow boundaries, and that they are or should be concerned that the very fluidity of this image may escape their doctrinal definitions?

The conclusion of Landolfo's travels indicates that this concern is well-founded. At the end of Lauretta's tale, the coastguards of the

⁵³ II.4.19: ". . . e sempre che presso gli venia [la cassa], quando potea con mano, come che poca forza n'avesse, la lontanava." It is of course possible to read the contrast between *tavola* and *cassa* and the contrast between clerical and mercantile interests, which some have read to be at the heart of the *Decameron*.

⁵⁴ See chapter 3, as well as Carlo Delcorno, *Exemplum e letteratura tra medioevo e rinascimento* and "Modelli agiografici e modelli narrativi"; see also Salvatore Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del medioevo*.

sea-journey are not the clergy, as stressed by Giovanni, but a simple, lay, feminine character, the poor little washerwoman from Corfu. Just as clerical authority is questioned in terms of Landolfo's means of survival—the chest replaces the board—so too is this authority undercut with regard to his rescue: a lay woman stands in the stead of the clerical, masculine watchers of the sea.⁵⁵ The feminine intervention at the close of Lauretta's tale completes a second dissolution of the clerical interpretation of the sea-metaphor. Landolfo lets go of the board that Passavanti had connected to the *lignum vitae*, the Cross, and he is saved by a woman who happens to see him from shore. The Dominicans normally regarded feminine nature as weak and fragile, variable as the sea, and yet this woman brings Landolfo to his senses and restores him to life.

In the *Decameron* as a whole it is women who lead the dance: the seven women who first decide to leave Florence and the Dominican church; and Pampinea, who is elected the group's first leader and establishes the rhythm of activity that characterizes their exile. Boccaccio calls women his earthly "muses," who inspire him to write and overcome all criticism. The "good woman" in Lauretta's story, too, puts into practice the work's first line in the Proem: "it is very human to have compassion with those in distress." She is "moved by compassion" for Landolfo.⁵⁶

The denouement of Landolfo's journey illuminates a more general aspect of the *Decameron*. Coming to one's senses, seeing what lies before one's eyes, is one of the purposes of Boccaccio's work.⁵⁷ Three other sea stories from the second day's storytelling also transgress the moralized boundaries that deter one from learning from experience. On the way to her wedding the virgin princess Alatiel is taken, through shipwreck and piracy, on a series of sexual adventures with eight different men before returning home and proclaiming her purity to her father, the Sultan of Babylon [II.7]. Bartolomea, the young wife of an aged Pisan lawyer, is caught adrift off the coast

⁵⁵ If one were so inclined, one could read the chest as a feminine, the board as a masculine image, in support of this reversal. Lauretta's parody in fact suggests wider implications for the study of iconography of the Trecento.

⁵⁶ On Boccaccio's "muses" [*Muse*] see IV.intro.35–36; Proem.2: "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti. . ."; II.4.24: "da compassion mossa." The epithet "buona femina" is used six times in II.4.25–30.

⁵⁷ See the emphasis on empiricism by Alberto Tenenti, "La rappresentazione della morte di massa nel Decameron."

by the pirate Paganino, and discovers the key to erotic fulfillment [II.10]. And Donna Zinevra, after being condemned to death under the pre-supposition of feminine sexual weakness, escapes across the sea to the Sultan's court and eventually proves her innocence to her misguided husband [II.9]. Scholars have mentioned Boccaccio's use of Greek or oriental romances as the sources for these stories, and our analysis of the sea-metaphor in his work helps explain why he did so.⁵⁸ These earlier tales made use of the sea-scape as an arena of temporal accident and fortune free from dogmatic disguise. They display an openness to time's flow in conditioning human experience prior to the placement of moral categories. This awareness is presaged in the very opening of the *Decameron* through the use of the sea-image. Boccaccio recalls his own experience of the hazards of love, how he almost "sailed too far upon [Love's] darkest depths" and was revived by the stories and consolations of a friend.⁵⁹

The sea-metaphor thus plays a central role in delineating Boccaccio's point of departure from the mendicant world-view. Boccaccio's perspective on life is not based on the *terrafirma* of the mendicant certainties, but on the contrary this perspective must orient itself in the

⁵⁸ See Branca's notes to II.7.1 (*Decameron*, n. 3; 1:224) and II.10.1 (n. 1; 1:303). In terms of direct sources, A. Collingwood Lee has noted a story of Xenophon of Ephesus as a source for II.7 (*The Decameron: Its Sources and Analogues* [New York: Haskell House, 1966], 36–37); for V.1, the story of Cimon's voyages, Ben Perry has also noted a Greek source (*The Ancient Romances* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967], 348 n. 9). Tomas Hägg has mentioned the refined eroticism of Milesian storytelling as an inspiration for Boccaccio, as well as the prevalence of shipwreck in these romances (*The Novel in Antiquity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], 171, 186; 174). Nicholas Holzberg's definition of the ancient novel illuminates the correspondence between Greek fiction and the *Decameron*: "... an entirely fictitious story narrated in prose and ruled in its course by erotic motifs and a series of adventures which mostly take place during a journey and which can be differentiated into a number of specific, fixed patterns" (*The Ancient Novel: An Introduction* [London: Routledge, 1995], 26). This conclusion over the influence of the ancient storytelling conflicts with Branca's opinion that Boccaccio consciously avoided using the "natural e suggestivi" classical models for his stories: *Boccaccio medievale*, 11.

Blumenberg has asserted an early association between water and money, beginning with Hesiod, and cites Vitruvius's reference in *De architectura* to Aristippus, who believed all that was necessary for life was what could be brought ashore after shipwreck, i.e. prudent self-sufficiency (*Shipwreck*, 9, 12). Petrarch attributes a similar serenity to either Bias or Stilpo after shipwreck in *Rerum mem.* III.66.3–6 (151–152).

⁵⁹ Proem.4–5: "Nella qual noia tanto rifrigerio già me porsero i piacevoli ragionamenti d'alcuno amico e le sue laudevole consolazioni, che io porto fermissima opinione per quelle essere avvenuto che io non sia morto. . . . che sol di sé nella mente m'ha al presente lasciato quel piacere che egli è usato di porgere a che troppo non si mette ne' suoi più cupi pelaghi navigando. . . ."

midst of the very ocean of existence, which is unstable, changeable, and mortal. The sea alerts one to the fact of temporal existence, shorn of moral attribution. Lauretta describes how even after Landolfo seized the plank, he was further from shore, more isolated and alone than ever before. His rescuer is a woman, whose very nature, in its supposed impulsive, passionate quality, was associated with the undulations of the ocean. In Boccaccio's view, the sea-image's existential qualities overflow the moral limitations placed upon it by the mendicants. Taking on the field of symbolic connotation promoted by the Church, Boccaccio suggests through his ironic use of these images that the moral authority of the clergy is not well-anchored, is itself insecure. One's outward experience is too variable, too filled with permutations of fortune that have no immediate moral origin—think only of the Plague! Inwardly people may no sooner escape from their passions and instincts than they can escape from the motions of existence. Lauretta's story will expose the Dominican concept of a stable moral refuge from the sea of existence as an aesthetic fallacy. For Landolfo, the means of rescue are provided in the temporal, feminine resources of the sea itself.

Turning to the work of Petrarch, we may observe the historical resonance of Boccaccio's new understanding of existential flow, as expressed through the sea-metaphor. How does Petrarch employ the image of the sea; and does his use clarify Boccaccio's metaphoric, along the lines of a shared humanism? As Petrarch's writings wrestle more explicitly with moral virtue, the sea-metaphor illustrates the ethical dimensions of the humanists' departure from the mendicant church, shedding light from a different angle on their relation to authority.

Petrarch's *Secretum* makes use of the image of sea-scape and shipwreck in order to convey Petrarch's perilous state of conscience:

And I, thrown into a vast sea, fierce and wild, drive my shivering little boat, split and cracked, over the high surges against the wind. I am certain that it cannot last longer and I see no hope of safety unless the Omnipotent, moved by mercy, allows me to turn the rudder with utmost force so that I reach the shore before I perish; so that I, who have lived upon the depths, may die in port.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Secretum*, 1.13.4: "Et ego, in mari magno sevoque ac turbido iactatus, tremulam cimbam fatiscentemque et rimosam ventis oblucantibus per tumidos fluctus ago.

The broader context of this quotation contains the classical text governing Petrarch's self-exploration in the *Secretum*: Virgil's *Aeneid*. Petrarch associates himself, on more than one occasion, with Aeneas's doomed pilot and friend Palinurus. In Virgil's epic, Palinurus fell into the sea, having been bested by Sleep (*Aen.* V.835–871). The *Secretum* cites Palinurus's words of resistance against the god to voice Petrarch's own fight against self-complacency. When Sleep urges Palinurus to rest from his labors, pointing out the sea's calm surface, Palinurus replies, "I do not trust this monster [the sea]."⁶¹ Petrarch quotes Palinurus's response to indicate that the sea of apparent tranquillity must be navigated with doubled courage, as it has easily immersed him in its temporal aspect and then suddenly revealed its turbulent nature.

Both in the *Secretum* as well as in the *Familiares* he uses other words of Palinurus to express his need for salvation from life's shipwreck. In Tartarus Palinurus's shade asks Aeneas to grant him proper burial, exclaiming:

. . . save me, undefeated one, from these evils. . . .
 give your own right hand
 and take me with you over the waves, that
 at least in death I find a place of rest.
 [eripe me his, invicte, malis. . . .
 da dextram misero, et tecum me tolle per undas;
 sedibus ut saltem placidis in morte quiescam]⁶²

These citations illustrate Petrarch's sense of existential flux, akin to that of Boccaccio's story. But Petrarch considers this flux to bear upon his own personal, moral standing. He quotes this last Virgilian passage in a letter to Giacomo Colonna, proclaiming that his life seems nothing more than "a slight dream or most fleeting phantasm." Reading Augustine's works awakens him, as if from a deep sleep: but the weight of his mortal nature [*mortalitatis sarcina*] closes his eyes

Hanc diu durare non posse certe scio nullamque spem salutis superesse michi video, nisi miseratus Omnipotens prebeat ut gubernaculum summa vi flectens antequam peream litus apprehendam, qui in pelago vixerim moriturus in portu." Petrarch's choice of words for his ship: "fatiscentemque et rimosam" echoes Virgil's use of *fatiscere* for shipwreck in *Aen.* 1.123. See also *Fam.* X.5.25, to Gherardo.

⁶¹ "me nec huic confidere mostro" (*Aen.* 5.849, cited 1.13.4).

⁶² *Aen.* 6.365; 370–371. I have followed with slight modifications the translation of the *Aeneid* by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 144–145; "per undas" is followed by Petrarch's phrase "per tumidos fluctus" in *Secretum* 1.13.4.

again. “My will fluctuates and my desires fall into discord, and so wound me with this discord.”⁶³ Echoing the sea-tossed pilot’s cry to Aeneas, Petrarch sees his need for rescue as desperate as Palinurus’s need for burial. For Petrarch has been unable, like Palinurus, to resist the charms of Sleep, understanding this god as the pull of his physical, bodily self against the “interior man.” This vacillation of will alludes to Petrarch’s appreciation of “fluctuating Augustine” in the later letter of 1342 to the Dominican Giovanni Colonna.⁶⁴

The letter to Giacomo Colonna shows how Petrarch’s mind used the associations of imagery and literary character to round together apparently diverse ideas and enrich his thinking as it moved from work to work, and context to context. One may associate the letter with the *Secretum*, for it proposes Augustine as a teacher in his sea-voyage of life learning, and declares the importance of reading classical texts along with Christian works.⁶⁵

In the *Secretum*, Augustinus warns Franciscus of divine judgment and the eternal nature of God’s wrath. Despite this impending judgment, Augustinus has told him, “the right hand [*dextera*] of God is powerful and prompt to save you from such evils [*malis*], as long as you seek this cure, and are eager to rise up. . . .”⁶⁶ The *dextera* of God saving him from the *malis* of the world clearly foreshadows Franciscus’s response; he quotes Palinurus’s “eripe de his . . . malis; da dextram misero.” Moreover, Palinurus’s request becomes for Franciscus part of a longer prayer to Jesus: “Alas, what do I do? Do I suffer? What end does fortune have in store for me? Have mercy, Jesus, help me. . . .”⁶⁷ The *Secretum*, in contrast to the *Familiares*,

⁶³ *Fam.* II.9.16–17: “Melius dixisses illa relegenti totam michi vitam nichil videri aliud quam leve somnium fugacissimumque fantasma. Itaque lectione illa excitor interdum velut e somno gravissimo; sed urgente mortalitatis sarcina, palpebre rursus coeunt; et iterum expergiscor, et iterum et iterum obdormio. Voluntates mee fluctuant et desideria discordant et discordando me lacerant. Sic adversus interiore hominem exterior pugnat. . . .”

⁶⁴ *Fam.* VI.4.13, cited above, chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Petrarch cites Augustine as one “. . . qui iam cristiane religionis fluitantem puppim inter hereticorum scopulos agens. . . .” (II.9.11). Though reading classical texts, he adds, has its own dangers for the voyager: “Rara lectio est que periculo vacet, nisi legenti lux divine veritatis affulserit, quid sequendum declinandum ve sit docens; illa autem duce, secura sunt omnia, et que nocere poterant, iam Sytribus et Caribdi aut famosis in alto scopulis notiora sunt” (*Fam.* II.9.13).

⁶⁶ *Secretum* 1.11.11: “. . . quod Dei dextera potens promptaque sit ex tantis malis eruere, dummodo te curabilem prebeas surgendique avidus. . . .”

⁶⁷ 1.12.3: “Heu quid ago? Quid patior? Cui me exitio fortuna reservat? Miserere,

develops a more direct and incisive spiritual examination of Petrarch's self, conveyed here through the image of the sea. In both writings, the waves relentlessly buffeting the body of Aeneas's friend are likened to the 'fluctuations' within Petrarch's will, as he struggles between perfecting his spiritual awareness and pursuing the goods of his "mortal nature."

Not surprisingly Petrarch uses the image of the sea and sea-storm to describe spiritual distress in his *Penitential Psalms*, the seven religious poems probably sent to his brother Gherardo at the Carthusian monastery in late 1348 or 1349, after his first draft of *On Religious Leisure*.⁶⁸ "I have become like one shipwrecked, who, goods gone, comes nude ashore, blasted by winds and sea." [Et factus sum naufrago simillimus, qui, mercibus amissis, nudus enatat, jactatus ventis et pelago.]. In other psalms the poet rebukes himself for vainly "believ[ing] to be in port when in the midst of storms" [mediis portum in tempestatibus putavi] and asks God to "calm now the waves and tempests of my mind" [Siste iam fluctus ac procellas animi].⁶⁹ The tone and tenor of these verses bespeak the poet's inner disquiet, a state of mind far from the *otium* or leisure Petrarch envisioned for his brother or wished for himself.

Petrarch's use of the sea-image is therefore more explicitly attuned to the moral and religious purposes of Passavanti than is Boccaccio's tale, and thus Petrarch's view of the human incapacity to halt or impede the temporal flow offers corroboration to the *Decameron's* parody of mendicant sermonizing. This becomes more evident when we see how the sea-metaphor in Petrarch's work elucidates his relation

Iesu, fer opem. . . ." See *De vita solitaria* 1.III.17 (p. 78): "Michi, qui adhuc magno naufragio laboro, sufficit Illius opem implorare, qui solus potens et prestare, quod poscitur." See the reference to Palinurus in this context in *De otio religioso* 67.26–32 and more general statements on shipwreck and salvation: 24.16–21; 26.1–4. Petrarch states that the monks have reached their port of safety: 42.34–43.1; 60.16–18.

⁶⁸ Petrarch discusses the composition of his psalms in a letter to his brother, *Fam.* X.3.56. See Henry Cochin's remarks in his edition of *Les psaumes pénitentiels* (Paris: Rouart, 1929), 30.

⁶⁹ These citations are from Psalm I, p. 38; VII, p. 74; and III, p. 52 respectively. It is difficult to avoid associating the image of the bereft shipwrecked survivor coming to shore with the first simile used by Dante in the *Commedia: Inferno* I.22–27. I am grateful to Dennis Looney for this reference to the *Commedia*. In a related use of the sea-metaphor, Petrarch thanks Boccaccio for sending him Augustine's commentary on the Psalms, calling Augustine "a sturdy ship and expert helmsman" [puppim . . . prevalidem et nauclerum industrium] for navigating the text (*Fam.* XVIII.3.3).

to classical philosophy, especially to the Stoics. In terms of the *Decameron*, Giuseppe Velli has considered how Seneca's ideas may have colored Boccaccio's views of the humanist poet and intellectual, who sought to integrate classical learning with vernacular culture.⁷⁰ Seneca's name also appears in the Dominican treatises we have been reviewing, in large part because he emphasizes moral freedom and reason's potential mastery of the emotions in securing the *summum bonum* through the practice of virtue.⁷¹

Petrarch admired the Stoical conceptions declared by Cicero and Seneca.⁷² "The more stable fortress of virtues" is the refuge against "the flux of fortune," he writes to the exiled Severo Appenninicola. "No one is unhappy unless he makes himself so."⁷³ In *Familiares* III.6 he explicitly places the true good in the mind, rejecting as "goods" the benefits of fortune or the body.⁷⁴ Augustinus argues this position in the *Secretum* against the more Peripatetic position of Franciscus.⁷⁵ Throughout his treatise *On the Life of Solitude* Petrarch himself promotes traditional Stoic conceptions, although he is careful to qualify them by recognizing his own failings.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Velli, "Seneca nel 'Decameron'": "L'*auctor* [Seneca] con la sua presenza aiuta allora a definire storicamente la posizione dello scrittore nei confronti della sua società e del suo tempo; il nuovo intellettuale fiorentino, e per lui la cultura della sua città, ha alle spalle un vasto retroterra che dalla tradizione prossima vernacola arriva ai classici" (333). See also Aldo Maria Costantini, "Studi sullo Zibaldone Magliabechiano," in *Studi sul Boccaccio* 7 (1974): 79–126. Costantini cites Alfonso Traini's comment (81, n. 1) that Seneca's style expressed both "il linguaggio dell'interiorità," of the self, as well as a language that preached human liberation as a whole.

⁷¹ Passavanti, *Specchio*, 231, 268, 275, *Sermones*, f.75vb, 147va; Giovanni, *Sermones funebres*, d.1s.7; see also *S.ex.* 6.52; Cavalca, *Specchio della croce*, c.42 (Newberry MS, 118r). Seneca's name appears with high frequency in Bartolomeo da San Concordio's *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*.

⁷² E.g. *Fam.* I.7.13, where he describes the Stoics as a "secta philosophorum fortis et mascula"; III.6.1; also II.3.3.,34; II.4.12; III.15.7; *Rerum mem.* III.66. See the numerous references to Seneca in his later work, *De remedijs utriusque fortune*; *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, v.5, 519–528. A fundamental study is Aurelia Bobbio, "Seneca e la formazione spirituale e culturale del Petrarca," *La bibliofilia* 43 (1941): 224–291.

⁷³ *Fam.* II.3.34, 22: "Verum ego, ut dixi, et hoc solatium et omne quod fortune ictibus subiectum est, sileo. . . . Redeo ad virtutum stabiliora presidia. . . .", and 3: "Nam et in ceteris formidatarum rerum generibus invenies neminem esse miserum qui se miserum fecit. . . ." See also the following letter to Severo, *Fam.* II.4.8.

⁷⁴ *Fam.* III.6.2–3, therefore siding with with the Stoics versus Aristotle and Epicurus: "Bonum vero quod querimus, in animo est, nec corpori serviens nec fortune; cetera vocari bona fateor, sed non esse contendo."

⁷⁵ *Secretum* 2.7.9–2.8.5

⁷⁶ See *De vita solitaria* I.II.14–15 (pp. 53–55); I.II.22 (p. 60); I.IV.14–15 (pp.

Petrarch appears to assume a Stoical viewpoint in two letters to Francesco Nelli. He wrote both letters in the 1350's from Milan, the time and place of his final revisions to the *Secretum*. In the first letter of 1353, he tells him. "I know well time's incredible speed and headlong flight that nothing may restrain unless a zealous and indefatigable virtue. . . ." ⁷⁷ The word for restraint, *frenum*, is the same term used by the Dominican Rainerio da Pisa, Matteo Villani, and the *Decameron* narrators to express the mind's control or lack of control of desire. Here Petrarch applies it to resisting the pull of time or temporality. Six years later, Petrarch spells out to Nelli how virtue may exercise this *frenum* or bridle. The practice of virtue, he writes, is the only secure defense against the fear of death, of the end of one's time on earth. Petrarch meditates on Seneca's epistle 32 to Lucilius, and claims that one must master this fear and "compose one's mind" to accept and love one's end, one's death. "This is truly to live a completed life [*vita peracta*], as Seneca said, and it is my opinion that for such a life nothing is sweeter when nothing frightens, nothing troubles, nothing causes anxiety, nothing is expected unless that which is sure to come and no obstacle can prevent. . . ." ⁷⁸

Emphasizing the power of Stoical serenity and self-sufficiency, Petrarch elsewhere chooses an image from nature antithetical to that of the sea: that of the mountaintop. Writing again to Nelli in 1355 about Nelli's role in "our city" of Florence, Petrarch remarks upon his friend's detachment of reason from the passions, and compares his "unmoved serenity" of mind to Mount Olympus rising above the clouds. ⁷⁹ He adumbrates this image in an eloquent passage from *On the Life of Solitude*, first drafted in 1346, where he discusses the vantage point of the solitary, who overlooks "the troubled actions of men. . . .":

94–96); 1.X.4–5 (p. 170); and for descriptions of solitude as a port or harbor from storms 1.IV.11 (p. 92); 1.X.9 (p. 174). Petrarch characterizes of his own state as one of shipwreck, as in note 67 above.

⁷⁷ *Fam.* XVI.11.6: ". . . agnosco fugam incredibilem lapsumque precipitem nullis nisi ardentis atque impigre virtutis arcendum frenis. . . ."

⁷⁸ *Fam.* XXI.12.5–6: "In primis, fateor, compendendum animum ad amorem finis. . . . Hoc est enim illud vivere vita peracta cuius mentio apud Senecam est; quo vite genere, ut opinor, nichil est dulcius, quando nichil terret, nichil sollicitat, nichil angit, nichil expectatur, nisi quod adeo venturum esse certum est, ut nullo obice possit arceri. . . ."; see Seneca *ad Luc.* 32.4: "O quando illud videbis tempus, quo scies tempus ad te non pertinere. . . ." And 32.5: "Ille demum necessitas supergressus est et exauctoratus ac liber qui vivit vita peracta."

⁷⁹ *Fam.* XVIII.9.4: "Puto, nubibus cinctus erat, quod excelsis montibus usu evenit, imo vero nubes excesserat; quod si Olimpo datur, quanto altior illa pars anime est passionum nebulas supergressa, ubi immota serenitas habitat. . . ."

To stand meanwhile as though on a high tower watching the troubled actions of men beneath your feet, to see all things in this world and yourself along with them passing away, not to feel old age as an affliction which has silently stolen upon you . . . but to expect it long in advance and be prepared for it with a sound body and serene mind . . .; not to love fleeting things but to desire things that endure and to submit patiently to circumstances; always to remember that you are a mortal but one who enjoys the promise of immortality; to travel back in memory and to range in imagination through all ages and all lands; to move about at will and converse with all the glorious men of the past and so to lose consciousness of those who work evils in the present; sometimes to rise, with thoughts that are lifted above yourself, to the ethereal region, to meditate on what goes on there and by meditation to inflame your desire . . . these are not the least important fruits of the solitary life, though those who are without experience in it do not appreciate it.⁸⁰

Here Petrarch presents how the serene practice of true leisure and contemplation flowers in the light of humanist speculation across time and place.

Yet the reader notes that transience is not forgotten, and that this ideal state, especially for Petrarch, is temporary. In 1351, a few years before his letter to Nelli, Petrarch discusses the death of Jacopo da Carrara, and employs a similar image, declaiming upon the sublime perspective afforded him from following reason to the summit of the mind:

For every time I ascend by the ways of reason to that of the highest peak of the ethereal mind, from where no less than from the top of Olympus one discerns the clouds below, I see in what gloom, surrounded by what cloud of error, in what darkness we wander. . . . I see that among mortal things there is nothing stable except virtue, that it alone makes those happy [*beatos*] whom it embraces and those unhappy whom it abandons. . . .⁸¹

⁸⁰ *On the Solitary Life*, 150; *De vita solitaria* 1.VI.5–6 (pp. 112–114): “Stare interim velut in specula res curasque hominum sub pedibus intuentem, videre omnia, teque imprimis, cum universitate transire . . . non amare, que fugiunt; optare, que permanent; hec ipsa, dum adsunt, ferre pacifice? Semper te meminisse mortalem, sed cui sit immortalitas repromissa; mittere retro memoriam perque omnia secula et per omnes terras animo vagari; versari passim et colloqui cum omnibus, que fuerunt gloriosi viri atque ita presentes malorum omnium opifices oblivisci, nonnunquam et te ipsum et supra se elevatum animum inferre rebus ethereis; meditari, quid illic agitur, et meditatione desiderium inflammare. . . . Qui, quod inexperti non intelligunt, non ultimus solitarie vite fructus est.”

⁸¹ *Fam.* XI.3.9–10: “Quotiens enim rationis passibus ad altissimam illam arcem

Unlike the uncertainty of the sea voyage, the mountain view is clear and perspicacious. The mind's eye is unclouded by passion, and reason, as in mendicant teaching, can place the emotions in their proper, inferior position, where they are managed by virtue.

The idea of gaining moral insight by ascending a mountain may be traced back to Hesiod, but it is important to see how the valence of this idea emerges in Petrarch's hands. In the most famous letter of the *Familiars* he describes how his brother Gherardo and he climbed Mount Ventoux. His brother took the straight but steep ascent; Petrarch's road was more circuitous and ultimately more arduous. At the summit he opens his copy of Augustine's *Confessions*, and sees himself rebuked for his worldly preoccupations to the neglect of his self: "And men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains and the great waves of the sea and the broad flow of rivers and ocean's reach and the heaven's turnings, and yet they abandon themselves."⁸²

As in the other letters, Petrarch receives illumination about the nature of life at the mountain's summit.⁸³ But the words of Augustine carry a characteristic irony through Petrarch's pen that qualifies the value of this insight and by implication the power of Stoicism. The reader only appreciates this irony when aware of the ever-present force of temporality in his writings.

The line from the *Confessions* indicts Petrarch for his weakness and distraction, rather than confirming his courage and devotion. It illuminates not his strength, but his fragility. The 'lesson' of the journey, above "the clouds of passion," condemns the motives, physical and temporal, that paradoxically inspired him to undertake the journey in the first place.⁸⁴

ethere mentis ascendo, unde non minus quam e summis Olympi iugis nubes sub pedibus cernuntur, video qua hic rerum caligne, qua errorum nube circumdati, quantus in tenebris ambulemus. . . . video in rebus mortalium preter virtutem solidi nichil esse, eam solam beatos facere quos amplectitur miserosque quos deserit. . . ." He concludes the sentence: ". . . et pedibus, ut aiunt, in hanc stoicorum sententiam totus eo, ita quidem ut diffinitionem illam omnium philosophorum diffinitionibus anteponam, que virtutem esse ait recte sentire de Deo et recte inter homines agere." For the dating of the letter, see Wilkins, *Petrarch's Correspondence*, 66.

⁸² *Fam.* IV.1.27: "Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos." The reference is to *Confessions* X.8.15.

⁸³ See also *De otio* 43.27–28; 89.34.

⁸⁴ *Fam.* XVIII.9.4: "nebulas passionum"; see *Fam.* IV.1.32; the climb and mountain imagery alludes also to Dante's *Purgatorio*.

This paradox points to a deeper irony, in the realm of the poetic. Augustine's words criticize him for becoming fascinated with the physical features of the two images under discussion, of mountain and sea. But Petrarch considers the mountain ascent, as well as the flow of the sea, as metaphors for his life's condition. The gyrations of his physical climb, he writes, are a metaphor for the turnings of his life's course, and hence for his failure to pursue the straight and steep way of virtue [IV.1.12–15]. Reading the images cited by Augustine as a metaphor for what illuminates his self, he finds himself still more destitute of wisdom. And yet without these diversions and turnings, the bends that individualize the arc of Petrarch's biography, there would be no ascent toward insight at all.

The sublime insight into one's ignorance and folly is echoed in the letter on the death of Carrara, where the 'peak of the mind' reveals to him the "cloud of error" that surrounds life's journey. Petrarch does not simply stand above this error, but finds himself enveloped within it. Like Boccaccio in his plague-story, he cannot remain aloof from his emotions or from the feelings of his compatriots. Reason is never detached from the senses, and the inherent subjectivity of the humanist perspective prevented them from viewing the world as an object apart from themselves. The tone of mendicant objectivity fails Petrarch. He must dwell in the course of time, below reason's summit, or, as he expresses it in the letter on Carrara:

And yet we men [*homines*], of a weak and fragile origin, living below in the valleys, under pressing burdens, only rarely embark toward the heights and therefore utter things that are closer to mediocrity than to the truth.⁸⁵

Reason's illumination is inherently conditioned by the weight of being human, and this conditioning is a vital attribute of the illumination. In the two letters from the 1350's to Nelli on virtue's restraint of temporality, Petrarch admits that "I find myself bereft [of virtue] and I weigh as if with my own eyes my doom," that he resides, as late as 1359, in a "middle state" between rejecting the snares of desire and attaining the completed life of serenity. The anxiety over temporality moves him to seek resistance against it through the prac-

⁸⁵ *Fam.* XI.3.11: "Sane nos, imbecille caducumque genus, homines imis in valibus habitantes gravi premente sarcina raro quidem ad excelsa conscendimus ideoque vulgo quam vero proximiora fabulamur."

tice of virtue; but the practice remains unperfected.⁸⁶ Petrarch declares Stoical serenity too high a goal for human striving. It has been proven by experience, he writes elsewhere, that no mind has “not been moved at least occasionally by mild disturbances and agitated by certain churnings of human passions.” At best one’s mind is like “a sturdy ship” that can find passage through the high waves of the sea. This conclusion, he notes, is not pleasing to the Stoics.⁸⁷

Petrarch therefore traces many modulations in his thinking about the moral precepts of Stoicism. When, both early and late within his work, he employs the metaphor of sea or water as a figure of time, he evokes a sense of mutability and impermanence more thoroughgoing than that found in either Seneca or the mendicant writers. His use of the sea-image demonstrates his awareness of how the flow of existence erodes the foundations of moral presuppositions and discloses a re-evaluation of the human condition closer to that of

⁸⁶ *Fam.* XVI.11.6: “. . . cerno me destitui damnumque meum pene oculis metior”; *Fam.* XXI.12.9: “Michi uni ex eorum grege qui medium locum tenent, qui necdum peracta, nec in longum cupiditatis imperio protrahenda nunquamque peragenda vita est, cui aliquid, cui multum desit, sed finitum tamen, cui preterea ad peragenda que superant non multis seculis sit opus, sed tamen tempore opus sit et sole temporis angustie timeantur, ea quam dixi laxandi temporis necessaria ars videtur.” Wilkins cites the date of XVI.11 as 1353; XXI.12 as 1359 (*Petrarch’s Correspondence*, 75 and 83). Here too one could add the contrast between the tones of *De otio religioso* and *De vita solitaria*, in which the former stresses human ignorance and transience, and the latter the means of overcoming the anxieties and cares provoked by this existential condition.

⁸⁷ *Fam.* III.15.4–5, opposing the tolerance of Horace (*Satires* I.3.68–69) to Stoic rigidity and potential hypocrisy: “Nam vitiiis meno sine nascitur; optimus ille et / Qui minimis urgetur.’ Sic est profecto; Stoici licet obstrepant, qui omnem morbum ex animis se radicitus avulsuros spondent; preclarissimi medicorum, modo quod pollicentur implerent. Set in vita hominum, de qua nobis amicitie deligende sunt, experimento compertum est nullam animum, quantalibet serenitate tranquillum, levibus saltem interdum perturbationis non moveri et quibusdam humanarum rerum turbinibus agitari. Ceterum, sicut armata navis, in alto fluctuabitur; non succumbet, eaque, ut navis, sic animi precipua laus erit; ita fit, quod Stoicis non placet, ut in hac vita, cui nichil scimus inesse perfectum, sanitatis locum tenet levis ac medicabilis egritudo.” Therefore it is not surprising that Petrarch should characterize the clash of viewpoints among the moral philosophers as winds that buffet the ship on high seas: “. . . sicut in alto navis quem portum petat ignara, sic vita hominum ad quem finem dirigatur nescia, vaga semper et incerta fluctuabitur, ut diversis illa flatibus, sic adversis hec exagitanda sententiis. . . .” *Rerum memorandarum* II.62.9, pp. 148–149. This view of Petrarch’s relation to Stoicism differs from the conclusion of Mazzotta, in *The Worlds of Petrarch*, 89: “What emerges from the quickest synopsis of the *Familiares* 17.4 and all of the *Familiares* is the adoption of an ethical scheme that is akin to the ethos of the Roman Stoics, though it is not entirely reducible to it.”

Boccaccio. This condition is marked less by concepts of virtue and sin than by the movements of time and emotion.

The early treatise of Petrarch, the *Book of Things Worthy of Remembrance*, comments on Heraclitus's epigram, "in the same river we step and do not step twice." Petrarch interprets the river as the flow of time, which drags all things with it. We step in the same river in name only; the river has changed, and we along with it.

So I see myself taken, so I am amazed at everything left behind me, just as the common passenger sees the well-trod shore disappearing before his eyes. . . . It is clear that most people are sluggish and lazy and—what surprises me even more—they allow their lives to flow away without sensing the nature of time and mortal things as a whole. . . . Thus it befalls them—I remain with this image—as it does sailors who sleep in their travel across the sea's immeasurable face: shipwreck startles them awake well outside the harbor, before they can save themselves.⁸⁸

The sea-metaphor conveys Petrarch's scepticism toward accepted certainties, the "well-trod shore," and his anxiety about their value. He is aware that time conditions experience and knowledge. There is no mention here of a refuge, moral or intellectual, against time's motion.⁸⁹ Writing to his brother in *On Religious Leisure*, he thinks again of Heraclitus, moving the metaphor to uncover the swirl of hidden passions and then the temporal nature of the world without, from shifting shape of one's self to that of cities at large: "For what, I ask you, is more like flowing water than the endlessly changing affairs of human beings? . . . The state of one's mind, the ebb and flow of life, and all aspects of existence are such that they seem to have been immersed in all the rivers of Tartarus, and to have received

⁸⁸ *Rerum memorandarum libri*, III.80.7–9, p. 172: "Sic me rapi vide, sic remanere michi omnia post tergum stupeo, ceu rudis vector secundis flatibus puppe convulsa litora nota circumspiciens ex oculis eripi. . . . Certe maiori hominum parti sedenti et otiose et—quod magis admiror—non sentienti tempus et mortalia cuncta preterfluunt. . . . Idem enim talibus evenit—ut in eadem similitudine versor adhuc—quod hiis qui immensum maris spatium dormiendo conficiunt: prius enim in portum delatos nauticus fragor excitat quam soluisse se noverint."

⁸⁹ It is possible to read Petrarch's remark in the *Rerum memorandarum* as a commentary on *Aeneid* III.72: "Provehimur portu, terraeque urbesque recedunt" [We leave the port, and lands and cities recede]. For Petrarch, the observer does not remain apart from the changes he witnesses, but he is altered along with them. Even when he strives to take on the imperturbable perspective of Stoic or orthodox virtue, he counters this perspective quickly by noting its transience and his variations of view. See Blumenberg's commentary on the citation from Virgil in *Shipwreck*, 15.

some characteristic of each one." Lethe brings forgetfulness of one's better nature, Phlegethon anger and desire, Acheron sterile regret and sadness, Cocytus lamentation, Styx hatred. From the inner emotional vacillations, inexorably carried by time's flow, Petrarch turns his view toward the impact of the changes in one's physical environment: "A great shock will stun you as you enter that same city which has become yet another, and you may say with Heraclitus: we enter into the same city twice, and yet we do not enter it."⁹⁰

The manner in which Petrarch shows forth the relation between the temporal and the psychological, a relation characterized by envisioning the self upon an unsteady sea-scape, deepens the classical and Augustinian references to the flow of time: not only is one's sense of time subjective, but also this sense itself varies, depending on one's mood or age. "But one might say", he writes in his sixties to Guido Sette, "that we have changed, and hence everything around likewise seems to us changed; the same thing seems different to a healthy eye and palate than a sick one. . . . I quite believe that if that past age were to return to us as we are today, it would not appear to us as it did then; were I to say that the years have done nothing at all to it, still it would surely appear different."⁹¹ In the

⁹⁰ Adapting *On Religious Leisure*, 85–87. See *De otio*, 58.10–11, 58.22–27, 59.4–6, 26–30; 60.25–26, 28–32: ". . . nam quid, oro, fluenti aque similis quam res hominum sine fine volubiles? . . . Is animorum status, ea fluctuatio vite est, ut tartareis vadis omnibus immersi et de unoquoque nacti aliquid, de Lethe oblivionem nature melioris, de Flegetonte irarum estus atque cupidem, de Acheronte infructuosam penitentiam et dolorem, de Cocito luctus et lacrimas, de Stige inimicitias atque odia largiter hausisse videantur. . . . Hec est fluminis enim natura: fugit et stat; aque fugiunt, flumen manet, et hoc est quod voluit dicere Heraclitus ille. . . . Michi, fateor, hoc amplius [than does Seneca, *ep.* 58, 23] videtur ut hominem et velocior rapiat cursus et manifestior, cum fugientibus aquis fluminis eadem facies sit, hominis autem annis labentibus tam diversa tamque alia prorsus, ut post paululum internosci nequeat vel ab his quibus cum amicitia et familiaritate coniunctus erat. . . . Fingite vero nunc vobis reditum ad easdem urbes: rogo, quic suspicamini? . . . durabit utcunque species locorum, interlabentur flumina, stabunt montes. Querete notos habitatores: nescio quomodo, prope omnes abierunt. Magnus vos habebit stupor eandem simulque aliam civitatem ingressos, ut dicatis cum Heraclito: in eandem civitatem bis intramus et non intramus."

⁹¹ *Seniles* X.2 in *Letters of Old Age*, trans. Saul Levin, Aldo Bernardo, and Reta Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 2:360–361. Wilkins places the final draft of the letter in 1367–1368 (*Petrarch's Correspondence*, 101–102). Petrarch therefore goes beyond, in his subjectivity, the classical awareness of time flowing "as we speak" [*dum loquimur*]. References to his adaptation of this phrase from Seneca, Horace and Ovid are noted by Folena, "L'orologio del Petrarca," 5. Nor is his sensibility simply reflective of Augustine's view of the vanishing present, as expressed in *Confessions* XI: this antecedent is noted by Folena, 5 and Taddeo, "Petrarca e il

preface to the first volume of *On the Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*, he expresses even more forcefully how this turning of time engages our entire being, moving us into waters of frightful uncertainty:

[W]e seem good for nothing else but to be tossed back and forth like balls, being creatures of the briefest moment yet of infinite anxiety, still ignorant of how to steer our boat to shore, how to reach decisions, and overcome our everpresent doubts.⁹²

In contrast to his mendicant contemporaries, Petrarch claims that both body *and* mind are borne across the sea. He understands Heraclitus's thinking in its original sense, which articulates how all individual things are unstable and subject to change. Petrarch's use of the sea-metaphor, like Boccaccio's, illuminates how the individual's relation to the flow of existence is decisive in how he experiences the presence of truth. What the sailors in Petrarch's early metaphor mistake in their dozing is, first of all, the power of time in existence, and not their immediate need for rescue from the temporal world through the moral devices offered by the Church. We do not, Petrarch suggests, live on the surface of time, experiencing it only in our bodies: on the contrary time is the very element in which we live, think and know. As he writes to Nelli, using the sea-metaphor: "Toward this close [death] we go with great force; every moment [*momentum*] drives us forward and thrusts us, against our will, from these depths into port: we are lovers of the way, cowards of the end, foolish travelers [*preposteros viatores*]."⁹³

That mistaking time's sway leads to folly and errors in judgment, to confusing the phenomenological with the noumenal, is expressed by Petrarch in a letter to Guido Sette:

tempo," 73. Petrarch stresses that one's measure of past and future time changes with age: see the references to *Fam.* X.5.19–20 and *De remediis* II.83, cited by Taddeo, 69; time appears longer for the young, shorter for the old.

⁹² *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 1:2–3; *De remediis*, 1:10: "Idonei visi sumus, qui, pilae in morem, huc illuc tam facile iactaremur, animalia aevi brevisissimi, sollicitudinis infinitae, quibus insciis cui puppim littori, cui animum consilio applicemus, pro consilio interim sit pendere. . . ."

⁹³ *Fam.* XXI.12.4: "Ad hanc finem imus magno impetu; omne momentum nos impellit et invitos ex hos pelago in portum trudit, vie amantes, metuentes termini, preposteros viatores." See also his remark in his late invective *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* [*On his own ignorance and that of many others*] 3.33: ". . . senescunt denique humana omnia" ["In sum, everything human grows old"] in *Invectives*, 252–253; ed. trans.

We err in many forms; for those things that seem goods are not and those we hope will last do not and those that one time leave do not return. Truly nothing stays itself any while, nothing finishes what it begins; all passes, time flows, the year turns, the day moves, the hours fly; the sun turns round his forgotten street, the moon differs daily and is always dissimilar to herself, never seeing her brother with the same eye. . . . Everything changes its state: earth, sea, and heaven itself, man, the most assiduous and noble resident on earth, whose destinies continually shake, whose mind is swayed by passion. . . .⁹⁴

One's involvement in the pull of existence undermines the hegemony of the mind's hold on being, which was proclaimed by the Dominicans and the Stoics. Unlike Seneca, Petrarch denies that time affects only the corporeal, tangible nature, those things that to the Stoics lacked real existence. Seneca, contemplating the same saying of Heraclitus, writes: "Our bodies are taken in the way of rivers. . . . We stand weak and flowing among vain things: let us center our minds on those things that are eternal. . . ." The mendicants adapted Seneca's conception to support their position the stable essence, the *locus tutus*, of the Church's sacraments, which the pious pilgrim grasped in mind and will.⁹⁵

Petrarch associates the inner instability of one's emotional life with the flowing of waters and the vicissitude of earthly existence.⁹⁶ Within

⁹⁴ *Fam.* XVII.3.25, 27: "Multiformiter hic erramus; nam et que videntur felicia non sunt et que speramus duratura non durant et que semel abiire non redeunt. Nichil idem diu permanet, nichil quale cepit desinit; universa pretereunt, tempus fluit, annus vertitur, dies properat, volant hore; sol obliquo calle circumflectitur, luna quotidie alia semperque dissimilis sibit, numquam uno oculo fratrem videt. . . . Omnia statum mutant: terre, maria, celumque ipsum, homo laborissimus incola nobilissimusque terrarum, cuius continue sortes tremunt, cuius mens movetur affectibus. . . ."

⁹⁵ *Ad Luc.* 58.22, 27: "Corpora nostra rapiuntur fluminum more. . . . Inbecilli fluidique inter vana constitimus; ad illa mittamus animum, quae aeterna sunt." Among other mendicant writings, see Simone Fidati's letter to Giovanni dalle Celle: "Durum est et impossibile corpore totaliter fieri extra seculum et omnino cunctos devitare sodales, sed ab affectionibus animus et ab hiis que mundus opportune et importune sensibus nostris obiecat solitudinem habet." Giovanni dalle Celle and Luigi Marsili, *Lettere*, ed. Francesco Giambonini (Florence: Olschki, 1991), 2:534. In the Franciscan *Fioretti*, Francis explains Friar Leone's dream vision of a river this way: "Il grande fiume è questo mondo; i frati che affogavano nel fiume sono quegli che non seguitano la evangelica professione, e specialmente quanto all'altissima povertà. Ma coloro che senza pericolo passavano sono quegli frati i quali niuna cosa terrena né carnale cercano né possegono in questo mondo. . . ." Levasti, ed., *Mistici del duecento e trecento*, 399.

⁹⁶ *De otio religioso*, 58.7-11: "Et si enim illa sit capitis nostri vox ad patrem, et

himself Petrarch felt the conflict between his quest for serene virtue (Stoic *apatheia*) and his acknowledged passions, which led him to question whether this virtue is adequate to the human condition. In response to the news of a friend's illness, he uses the sea-image to express the unsteadiness and perilous state of human life. "Nowhere is it safe for man [Nichil ulla ex parte tutum homini . . .]: for often when a sea shows tranquillity on its surface, a storm is brewing in the depths; and when the world is sunniest, it is silently preparing its snares. . . ."97 Petrarch then associates, by means of the sea-image, the nature of the world with that of his own character: superficially peaceful and indifferent, but prone to sudden turbulence. And with respect to his own state of mind, he admits that it cannot be stabilized by philosophic virtue:

I shall confess my weakness: when I first heard the sad news—so that you may know I am more man than philosopher [*hominem potiusquam philosophum*]
—I was grieved so humanly [*humanitus*] that suddenly the happy tranquillity of my initial quiet was changed to anguish, and I myself often had to castigate the irresolution of my mind.

He repeats this distinction when expressing his grief over the death of Carrara: "I should grieve over nothing except his death, although I cannot deny that this grief stems more from human passion than from philosophical progress."⁹⁸ This emotional susceptibility, the "weakness, irresolution," was considered by the Dominicans to be symptomatic of the world's way, and a form of sinful effeminacy. Petrarch calls it a prime attribute of being human.

A succinct portrayal of this conflict, as characterized through the sea-metaphor, between serenity and passion, stable virtue and the

nostra nichilominus esse potest, cum aquarum nomine voluptates et carnalia hec aquarum more labentia solere accipi certum sit; nam quid, oro, fluenti aque similis quam res hominum sine fine volubilis?"

⁹⁷ See the earlier references from Giovanni, regarding the refuge [*locus tutus*] of penitence. *Fam.* XVI.6.5: "Nichil ulla ex parte tutum homini; sepe dum maris summa tranquillitas in superficie videtur, tempestas in fundo est, et tunc dum maxime blanditur, tacitas mundus intendit insidias. . . ."

⁹⁸ *Fam.* XVI.6.8: "Fatebor autem tibi imbecillitatem meam: ad primum mesti rumoris adventum, ut me hominem potiusquam philosophum scias, humanitus indolui usqueadeo ut subito in merorem leta prius otii mei tranquillitas verteretur, et ipse animi mei sepe molliem castigarem." XI.3.8: ". . . nichil preter exitum lamentari, quanquam hoc ipsum humani potius affectus quam philosophici profectus esse non negem."

flux of human existence, can be found by reading the two prefaces in the *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*. After proclaiming human ignorance and uncertainty in the first preface, he adds that the wise authorities from the past are “like so many bright stars fixed on the firmament of truth” which “point us to the port of rest” in the manner of “true philosophy.”⁹⁹ But if at this moment the ancient sages are stable, one’s view of them is not. In the preface to the second volume, Petrarch returns to the sea-image in contemplating Heraclitus’s dictum “everything exists by strife”: “Man himself, lord of the earth and ruler of all living creatures, the only one who with the rudder of his reason should be able to control calmly the course of his life and its swirling, turbulent seas, is engaged in continuous strife, not only with others, but also with himself. . . .”¹⁰⁰ Even as one may gaze upward at the wisdom of the ancients, one’s own course is often diverted by elemental discord both from without and from within.

Petrarch’s vernacular verse employs the figure of the sea to express more immediate and dire emotional distress than does his Latin prose. Similar to the change in voice we witnessed in the previous chapter, the poet of the *Canzoniere* speaks his mind with greater intensity and directly to his reader. Yet as in his Latin works he uses the sea-metaphor to emphasize the passage of time and his inner distraction and wandering. This understanding appears with great force in the sonnet 272:

Life takes flight and never rests a moment,
and death runs behind with giant steps;
and matters present and those past
wage war on me, and future things as well;

⁹⁹ *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 1:4; *De remediis*, 1:10: “. . . interque perpetuos animorum fluctus, ceu totidem lucida sidera, et firmamento veritatis affixa . . . et portum nobis quietis ostendunt. . . . Haec est vera philosophia. . . .” See however Petrarch’s remark on the clash of philosophical opinion in the *Rerum memorandarum* II.62.9, pp. 148–149: “. . . sicut in alto navis quem portum petat ignara, sic vita hominum ad quem finem dirigatur nescia, vaga semper et incerta fluctuabitur, ut diversis illa flatibus, sic adversis hec exagitanda sentiis. . . .”

¹⁰⁰ *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 3:10. *De remediis*, 1:546: “Homo ipse, terrestrium dux et rector animantium, qui rationis gubernaculo solus hoc iter vite et hoc mare tumidum turbidumque tranquille agere posse videretur, quam continua lite agitur, non modo cum aliis, sed secum!” Petrarch adds his observations from the natural world: “Rapido stelle obviant firmamento; contraria invicem elementa configunt; terre tremunt; maria flutuant, aer quatitur; crepant flamme . . . que vicisitudo dicitur, pugna est. . . .” (1:530).

And remembering and waiting charge at me
 from this side and that; so that in truth
 if I did not feel compassion for my very self
 I would by now be free from these thoughts.
 It returns to me what sweetness
 my sad heart once possessed; yet from the other side
 I see turbulent winds facing my voyage,
 I see a storm in port, and weary now
 my helmsman, and broken mast and sails,
 and the fair lights I used to follow, gone.

[La vita fugge et non s'arresta un'ora,
 et la morte vien dietro a gran giornate,
 et le cose presenti et le passate
 mi dànno guerra, et le future anchora;
 e 'l remembrare et l'aspettar m'accora,
 or quinci or quindi, sì che 'n veritate,
 se non ch'i' ò di me stesso pietate,
 i' sarei già di questi pensier' fora.
 Tornami avanti, s'alcun dolce mai
 ebbe 'l cor tristo; et poi da l'altra parte
 veggio al mio navigar turbati i venti;
 veggio fortuna in porto, et stanco omai
 il mio nocchier, et rotte arbore et sarte,
 e i lumi bei, che mirar soglio, spenti.]¹⁰¹

Petrarch uses the image also developed by the mendicants, of life as a sea-voyage. It may be, as commentators have alluded, that Petrarch is also adopting the verses here of Friar Guittone d'Arrezzo, of the thirteenth-century Tuscan school:

Like a empty boat
 is our heart in the high, stormy sea,
 where still it flees the port and seeks the rocks,
 and truly death does not rest from running after.

[Legno quasi diguinto
 è nostro core in mare d'ogne tempesta,
 ove pur fugge porto e chere schoglia
 e di correr ver morte ora non resta.]¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Musa, 392. See also the imagery in *Ep. metr.* I.14.34–39, sparked by his experience of the plague: “Sic, velut in dubiis deprensus nauta procellis, / cum ferus ante oculos socias absorbit alnos/ Neptunus, fragilem qui utero crepuisse carinam / sentit et illisos scopulis conflagere remos / ac procul horribiles clavum videt ire per undas, / hereo consilii incertus certusque pericli. . . .” And 118–120: “Vixisti in pelago nimis irrequietus iniquo; / in portu morere, et languentia comprime vela, / collige disiectos iam tempestate rudentes.”

¹⁰² “O cari frati mei,” lines 66–69 in *Le rime*, ed. Francesco Egidi (Bari: Laterza,

The sense of urgent temporality is shared by all these writers, humanist and mendicant. But Petrarch stresses the existential predicament of one's immersion in time, rather than, as do the moralists, the voluntary decision to 'flee the port and seek the rocks.' To the poet of the *Canzoniere*, the ship inexorably heads toward his port, his end, where yet another storm awaits.¹⁰³

Guittone's poem begins, "O my dear brothers [*frati*], with wickedness / our sin has blindfolded the mind / and usurped our reason!" [O cari frati miei, con malamente / bendata hane la mente / nostro peccato e tolto hane ragione!]. In Petrarch's sonnet, reason may be "my helmsman," congruent to the mendicant understanding. But in contrast to sin's blindfold, the poet speaks of disparate passions and vicissitudes of fortune that have fatigued his pilot, and, as in the second preface of the *Remedies for Fortune*, the "rudder of reason" is neglected during the storms of life.¹⁰⁴

The other imagery in the sonnet accords with this existential reading. "The fair lights" that have guided the poet are extinguished [*spenti*]; commentators have remarked that this is an allusion to the eyes of Laura, his love who now is dead.¹⁰⁵ But if we interpret this image of "lights" in context of the sea-image of the Latin writings, and in consequence to our discussion of experience and authority in the previous chapter, the "lights" may also refer to the "bright stars" of ancient wisdom, which have, in this moment of crisis, vanished from the poet's sight. They are not dead, only he cannot see them in the storm and gloom. Like Landolfo Rufolo he is adrift, without orientation, and heading for death. Time has indeed brought him Laura's death, but more essentially Laura's life and death represent the passage of time, which grants and takes from the poet alternating instants of clarity and confusion, and clarity about his confusion, in a manner similar to Petrarch's vision from the mountaintop.

We can therefore understand that the poet's "compassion" [*pietate*] in line seven of the sonnet does not simply keep him from suicide

1940), canz. 32, p. 85. Egidi's note (323) on line 67 deserves mention: "Non mi par dubbio che si parli del cuore; e il fuggire verso la morte indichi il precipitare incessante verso la perdizione, anziché l'inesorabile fuga del tempo verso la fine della vita terrena." See Santagata's reference to this canzone in *Canzoniere*, 1097–1098.

¹⁰³ The count of the poems in the *Canzoniere* is 366, suggesting the temporal cycle.

¹⁰⁴ See *Canz.* 132.10–11 "Fra sì contrari venti in frale barca / mi trovo in alto mar senza governo"; also 177.7–8, 235.13–14, 277.7, 366.70 and the full sonnets 189 and 235.

¹⁰⁵ Musa, *Canzoniere*, 674; Santagata, *Canzoniere*, 1099, also citing Natalino Sapegno.

and damnation, as Marco Santagata has suggested.¹⁰⁶ For both Petrarch and Boccaccio, compassion is a natural response to the frailties of the human condition, which is irrevocably subject to death and thus to ontological anxiety. One's emotional susceptibility may make one, in Petrarch's words, "more man than philosopher" [*hominem potiusquam philosophum*]. Yet one should regard compassionately human weakness because this regard is, to cite Boccaccio, a *umana cosa*, a very human thing, that helps one stay not only alive but whole, sane and fully human.

Petrarch also characterizes the relation between philosophy and humanity in this more complementary way when writing to Nelli. In the letter from 1353 he writes that his meditation on time's flow and ontological anxiety relates reciprocally to understanding his friend's condition and state of mind: "So that you do not think that I have philosophized in vain, I know your mind and your habits, I who focus completely on the events of my friends. . . . You are in pain, tormented, agitated and afflicted, and yet while you are most silent, your humanity cries out, your unfailing compassion [*invicta pietas*] inquires after my affairs, how and where I am, what I am thinking, how I struggle."¹⁰⁷ Here Petrarch re-assesses "philosophy" in terms of understanding the wrestling with temporal existence, and of the consequences of this understanding: it provides insight into the struggle of others, and bears compassion for it.

Petrarch's remarks on the relation between the 'human' and the 'philosophical,' between nature and virtue, in context of Boccaccio's characterization of the human condition, shed a new light on the phenomenon of humanism itself in the mid-Trecento. As we have seen, the humanists' argument with the Church or tradition does not restrict itself to issues of classicism or rhetoric, as it has often been described, most famously by Paul Kristeller, nor to explicit treatises on moral philosophy.¹⁰⁸ Humanism for Boccaccio as well as for

¹⁰⁶ Santagata, *Canzoniere*, 1098.

¹⁰⁷ *Fam.* XVI.11.7: "Neve me frusta hodie philosophatum putes, novi ego animum moresque tuos, de amicorum successibus totus pendens. . . . Ueris angeris estuas afflictaris et dum maxime siles, clamat humanitas tua, meque de rebus meis invicta pietas interrogat, qualiter atque ubi sim, quid cogitem, quid moliar."

¹⁰⁸ See for example Kristeller's *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York, Harper and Row, 1961) and Lohr, "Metaphysics" in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, 569.

Petrarch rather embraces the question of how one may posit *a priori* moral virtues as regulative when all thinking is conditioned by the flux of time. In the humanists' use of the sea-metaphor, the Church's morality is itself adrift, like the board of Landolfo Rufolo.¹⁰⁹

The inherent instability of the *saeculum*, however, need not obscure the outlook on the Transcendent. On the contrary it may open up a new perspective towards it. God, Petrarch writes, is the "faithful, most loving pilot, steering you to salvation."¹¹⁰ And in the final poem of the *Canzoniere* he prays:

Virgin bright and stable in eternity,
 the star above all this tempestuous sea,
 the faithful guide of every faithful helmsman:
 consider well in how terrible a storm
 I find myself alone, without a tiller,
 and I am close to my last drowning shouts.

¹⁰⁹ The concern for temporality also found a more organic presence in the visual art of the Renaissance, when compared to representations of death and time in Trecento ecclesiastical circles. A portrayal of the mendicant understanding can be seen in the *Triumph of Death* fresco in Pisa, a work often brought into association with the *Decameron* (as in Battaglia Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino*; on its formal characteristics in relation to ecclesiastical representations, see Hayden Maginnis, *Painting in the Age of Giotto*, 142–144). This fresco contains in part the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, as discussed by Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*, (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1996), 134–138. The dead are shown in various stages of decay and a hermit hovers overhead with his moral. While the dead show the effects of decomposition, the living are all of the same age, at the peak of health. This is symbolically very significant, for it suggests the static, universal significance of *memento mori*: all people look at death the same way, with horror and revulsion, and, as made clear by the hermit, with the opportunity to turn to penitence. As in Giovanni's funeral sermons, no variety of perspectives is allowed, certainly no celebration of life: all is vanity. See *S.fun.*, Proemium 1: concerning the *eruditio populi*, preachers should emphasize *contemptum mundi*, "praedicando videlicet eis et labores et dolores mundana diligentium"; the first set of sermons contains those "qui loquuntur generaliter de miseria humana vite."

One may also consider how Renaissance artists examined temporality in the portrayal of the "four ages of man," focusing on how our lives change as we grow older in time. The artistic differences between the Pisan frescoes of the *Triumph of Death* and these later portrayals help distinguish how the mendicants conceived of time and mortality as a possibility for penance, as a pathway to the eternal afterlife, from how the humanists broached the awareness that time conditions all experience, all understanding. Every general claim about life, death, and the human experience springs from the particular historical moment and unique personality. Any judgment is provisional, not least the dicta of the Church, requiring in turn repeated affirmation by individuals through time and in time.

¹¹⁰ Dialogue II.76 in *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 3:173; *De remediis*, 1:860: "... fidus tueque salutis amantissimus gubernator est."

But nonetheless in you my soul has faith,
though it, I cannot deny, be sinful. . . .

[Vergine chiara et stabile in eterno,
di questo tempestoso mare stella,
d'ogni fedel nocchier fidata guida:
pon mente in che terribile procella
i' mi ritrovo sol, senza governo,
et ò già da vicin l'ultime strida.
Ma pur in te l'anima mia si fida,
peccatrice, i' nol nego. . . .]¹¹¹

While the Virgin as *stella maris* was a commonplace among medieval theologians, including Passavanti and Giovanni da San Gimignano,¹¹² Petrarch sees her guiding the soul as it voyages not simply across the tempting, sinful world, but rather upon the unstable, dynamic sea of existence. The sea-metaphor conveys for the humanists both the fluctuating quality of existence, and the need for spiritual resolution.

If spiritual resolution is not Boccaccio's concern in the *Decameron*, his work may yet clarify the religious potentialities of experience by removing doctrinal turbidity. He expresses the religious dimension more directly in his poetry, as in *Rime* CX, a poem that recalls Franciscus's conversation with Augustinus in the *Secretum*:

We are so spun about on the high seas,
And whatever the cruelty of the winds,
The thrashing waves and fierce chances could do,
We have tested; nor has any sign
Rescued our sea-trip, with sail or by oar,
From the threatening dangers
Among sharp reefs and hidden shoals,
But only He who can do whatsoever he will.

[Assai sem raggirati in alto mare,
e quanto possan gli empiti de' venti,
l'onde commosse e i fier accidenti,
provat' abbiamo; né già il navigare
alcun segno, con vela or con vogare,
scampati ci ha dai perigli eminenti
fra' duri scogli e le secche latenti,
ma sol Colui che, ciò che vuol, può fare.]¹¹³

¹¹¹ 366.66–73, adapting freely Musa's translation in *Canzoniere*, 513. Compare the image of "mi trovo in alto mar senza governo" in *Canz.* 132.10–11.

¹¹² *Summa de exemplis* 7.4: Virgin as *stella maris* "dirigit navigantes."

¹¹³ CX.1–8, in Boccaccio, *Rime*, ed. Vittore Branca (Mondadori, 1992), 89. For

The *Decameron* is devoted to uncovering the flow of existence concealed by clerical and social convention. The same sense of change and movement leads Petrarch to refer to Heraclitus once more in the Preface to the second volume of his *Remedies for Fortune*, where he writes in this vein: “we are never whole, never just one, but at odds with ourselves, self-destructing.” Here Petrarch alludes to the first poem of the *Rime sparse*, when he recalls “when I in part was not the man I am today.”¹¹⁴ We may apply this idea to the *Decameron*. Its meaning appears never whole, never just one, but at odds with itself, self-contradictory. Yet this meaning has an existential origin, conveyed through the sea-metaphor. The lack of apparent unity in the work, its continual ability to upset pre-conceived expectations, is in harmony with the perceived condition of its readers. The work with its ten different narrators informs its readers that they also change moment to moment, day to day. They live in and through time, experiencing its flow inwardly and outwardly. A moral doctrine that does not respect this existential movement is abstracted from life. It lacks the “very human quality” of compassion for those in distress, for it has fixed its belief in solid ground. By contrast the humanism of the *Decameron* suffers with the distressed, for it acknowledges that all are at sea, never whole, never just one, that each was in part different yesterday from what he is today.¹¹⁵

And in Italy at least, this struggle between clergy and humanists ended with the Church having the final word. At a time that marks the close of the Renaissance, the Council of Trent in 1546 issued its chapter on the Fallen and their Restoration. This chapter confirmed Passavanti’s penitential theory by declaring that “the Holy Fathers have aptly called [the sacrament of Penance] a second board after the shipwreck of grace lost.”¹¹⁶ The Council here anathematized

other examples of the sea-metaphor from his poetry, see XXIII.3–4; 34.66–80; 41.7–9; 44.1–8. See the passage cited above from *Secretum* 1.13.4.

¹¹⁴ *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 3:12; *De remediis*, 1:550: “. . . nusquam totus, nusquam unus, secum ipse dissentiens, se discernens.” *Canz.* I.4: “Quand’era in parte altr’uom da quel ch’i’ sono.”

¹¹⁵ It is fitting that the work expresses this understanding indirectly, through the guise of story-telling, without appealing to the authority of the story-teller. The reader, like the narrator, is afloat, and comes to this understanding before him without dogmatic preconceptions or guidance.

¹¹⁶ Cap. 14. *De lapsis et eorum reparatione*: “Hic enim iustificationis modus est lapsi reparatio, quam ‘secundam post naufragium deperditae gratiae tabulam’ sancti Patres apte nuncuparunt.” Cited in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 24/25th ed. (Barcelona: Herder, 1948), §807.

Luther for rejecting this dictum, when he argued that it undermined the role of baptism in the remission of sins.¹¹⁷ Yet Trent furthermore rebutted the viewpoint of Erasmus's colloquy "The Shipwreck," which, in a manner similar to that of the *Decameron*, employed the image of sea and ship to expose clerical pretence and hypocrisy.¹¹⁸ The clerical shore was building jetties now against the erosion of its power, and not only against the threat of Protestantism.¹¹⁹ The concern with the sea of existence retreated to a melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, and awaited a revival from other quadrants. At the end of their own lives, Petrarch and Boccaccio would themselves initiate this withdrawal, even though the formal core of their writings, characterized by temporal, subjective, passionate utterance, would remain potent.

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (Weimar: Herman Böhlau), 6:527: "... prebuit his opinionibus occasionem verbum illud periculosum divi Hieronymi, sive male positum, sive male intellectum, quo poenitentiam appellat secundum post naufragium tabulam, quasi baptismus non sit poenitentia." This idea of Luther was expressly condemned by Trent's *Canones de sacramento poenitentiae*, can. 2 (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, §912).

¹¹⁸ *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 138–146. Here it is a woman and child who calmly ride a plank to shore, while clergy bicker and invoke various saints. I am indebted to Jodi Bilinkoff for this reference.

¹¹⁹ Although Blumenberg is unaware of the history of the board- or plank-metaphor among Catholic theologians, he mentions two instances of its use that underscore its ultimately ironic transformation in the nineteenth century, a period he calls "the epoch of shipwrecks" (*Shipwreck*, 67). He cites its use by Goethe (18) and by Emil Du Bois-Reymond, who, speaking before the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1876, employs it as a symbol for Darwin's theory of natural selection: "We may henceforth, while we hold fast to this doctrine, feel like a man who would otherwise helplessly sink, were it not that he clings to a plank that barely holds him above the water. In a choice between the plank and going under, the advantage is decidedly on the side of the plank" (73).

CHAPTER SIX

THE ETHICS OF PLEASURE: FACES OF THE FEMININE

Both the mendicants and humanists we have studied understood the sea-metaphor to symbolize not only the passage of time but also the movement of emotion. The undulations of the sea portray alterations in one's passions that color one's perspective of the truth. In following the formation of philosophy in the early Renaissance, we must note how these fourteenth-century writers concerned themselves with the realities of earthly beauty, pleasure, and sexual desire. The *Decameron* is replete with stories of erotic intrigue and Petrarch wrestles with these realities in his prose and poetry, having Augustinus, for example, scold Franciscus for his sensuous passion in the *Secretum*. For the Dominicans desire is naturally subordinated to reason's guidance, which sanctifies and orders these impulses. The humanists however consider this moral design alien to experience, a design for which they might at times devoutly wish, but one that, in their scrutiny of the human condition, shows itself to be more tyrannical than temperate, more imposing than impressive. For Petrarch and Boccaccio the fluctuation of emotion and desire paradoxically teaches one about the boundaries of ethical behavior, if occasionally by transgressing those boundaries. The relation between ethical understanding and sensual passion was therefore dialectical, and only from this dialectical energy could irony and paradox point out the flaws of the rational order of the mendicants. As this order depended on the clear sovereignty of reason over passion, it was inherently non-dialectical.

These Dominicans and humanists often expressed their moral thinking through their view of the feminine. They saw the feminine as an image not only of sexual passion, but of emotional desire in general. Yet this image operates in the mendicant and humanist understanding of morality in strikingly different ways. The image of the feminine, like the image of the sea examined in the previous chapter, therefore helps demonstrate how the humanists revised mendicant thought.

Recent scholars have analyzed how late-medieval clergy justified the moral suppression of desire and sexuality by drawing upon the

ascetic notions of the Church Fathers.¹ This scholarship has also examined how the clergy categorized women in their moral schema, including the connotations of women as seductress and savior.² But it is critical to see how, during the crisis of the fourteenth century, religious writers understood the feminine in its broader psychological associations. The Tuscan Dominicans, who were, we have seen, among the closest moral interlocutors of Petrarch and Boccaccio, responded to this crisis, in writings that ranged from the Latin handbooks of Rainerio da Pisa and Giovanni da San Gimignano to the vernacular treatises of Cavalca and Passavanti. These Dominicans consider the feminine to represent typically a sea of treacherous and unstable emotions but also, when purified and ordered, mercy and compassion.

In contrast to the Dominican view, Boccaccio and Petrarch regard the feminine in their characteristically dialectical way, overcoming the bifocal and hierarchical division between feminine lasciviousness and purity and between passion and reason. Once again they ground their perspective subjectively, undermining the clerical claim for objectivity towards women and the feminine, and towards the emotional sphere altogether. Internalizing and integrating the feminine within the realm of the psyche, the humanists perceive the human condition as existentially limited in its knowledge and subject to reversal, and therefore, at its best, open and responsive to the temporal moment. Just as we find the Dominican moral viewpoint in their various treatises, so too the humanists share this existential perception despite the diversity of novella and poem, frame-story and autobiographical dialogue.

¹ See Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1993), especially chapter 2.

² Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Maria Consiglia De Matteis, ed., *Donna nel Medioevo: Aspetti culturali e di vita quotidiana* (Bologna: Patron, 1986); Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980); Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) and his edition *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). Howard Bloch has analyzed within the medieval literary tradition the development of views of women, seeing “the uniqueness of Christianity” to consist in “simultaneously . . . a gendering of the flesh as feminine, an esthetization of femininity, and a theologizing of esthetics” (*Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 89–90). He does not elaborate upon the psychological and emotional qualities attached to the feminine.

Bartolomeo da San Concordio illustrates the Dominican moral psychology in a passage from his *Teachings of the Ancients*. Distinction 30, "On Anger," stresses that "wrath defeats all wisdom" and cites Seneca's *De ira* III for support:

The most sovereign part of the world, the one most ordered and closest to heaven, is not disturbed by clouds, nor whipped by storms, nor troubled by turmoil, and in fact has no discord: it is the inferior parts further down that are stormy. In the same way the highest mind, always quiet and at peace, placing beneath itself everything that is roiled by wrath, is temperate and venerable and well-disposed: qualities never found in an angry man.³

Here Seneca and Bartolomeo allude to the imagery of the mountain as a metaphor for sovereign reason, a metaphor we saw Petrarch both employ and question. In other Dominican writings the Virgin may exemplify reason's ordered rule over the passions; conversely the sensual emotions themselves could be taken as an unredeemed aspect of the feminine. Passavanti explains in a sermon that "Mary is interpreted as lady [*domina*] and signifies the soul that is a true lady [*domina*] who subjugates to herself and to the judgment of reason all inferior powers and all insurgent passions." Yet Passavanti, later in the sermon, sees women as embodying these passions. He embellishes Ovid's *Ars amatoria* I.244: "Venus in wine, fire in fire was love," then declaims, "thus woman captivates and stimulates man."⁴

In their pursuit of this moral order, demarcated by both faces of the feminine, the Trecento Dominicans employ various media of expression, from Latin sermon to vernacular handbook. We have

³ *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, 258 (d.30, c.2): "Che l'ira toglie ogni sapienza"; 259: "La parte sovrana del mondo più ordinata et prossima al cielo non si turba di nebbia, non si scommove di tempesta, non si rivolge in turbinio, senza ogni romore è; queste [parte inferiori] di giù tempestano. In questo medesimo modo l'alto animo sempre cheto in riposata maggiore allogato il quale pone sotto sè tutte le cose, onde si tragge l'ira, è ammodato e venerabile e bene diposto; delle quale cose niuna ne troverai nell'adirato." The reference is to Seneca's *De ira* 3.6.1: "Pars superior mundi et ordinator ac propinqua sideribus nec in nubem cogitur nec in tempestatem impellitur nec versatur in turbinem; omni tumultu caret: inferiora fulminantur. Eodem modo sublimis animus, quietus semper et in statione tranquilla conlocatus, omnia infra se premens quibus ira contrahitur, modestus et venerabilis est et dispositus; quorum nihil invenies in irato."

⁴ Sermon 76r-v: "... maria interpretatur domina. Et signat animam que est vera domina subiciens se et iudicio rationis omnes vires inferiores et omnes passiones insurgentes. . . . Ovidius de arte amandi et venus in vinis ignis in igne fuit amor, etiam mulier hominem captivat et stimulat."

seen how they promote the sacrament of penance, being urgently aware that time flows toward looming death; here too, convinced that their listeners stood insecurely on moral ground, they bring forth a confluence of counsel directed toward achieving and maintaining a regulated emotional life. They often view the sexual instinct or the emotion of love as the most obvious danger to this order, circumscribing it, from least to most perilous, with the names *sensualitas*, *concupiscentia*, and *luxuria*.⁵ This instinct demands, therefore, special oversight. When Dini preaches to his congregation about the sacrament of marriage, he tells them it moves [*transmigrans*] one “from matters of the flesh to those of the spirit.” One should avoid a love that is “excessive and overflowing” and devote oneself instead to a love that is “chaste and ordered,” modeling one’s behavior on that of the elephants, who, according to tradition, are paradigms of continence, abstaining from sexual intercourse for periods of up to six years.⁶ Similarly Cavalca, in his *Mirror of the Cross*, discusses the transience of worldly love, and emphasizes how Christ and the Cross “guide and order love” into its proper, spiritual sphere of charity.⁷ Therefore the guiding principle of reason, strengthened by grace, subjugates the emotions, creating an harmonious order.

In the mendicant morality the ordered inferiority of emotion to reason is natural. Cavalca writes that human dignity is cast down

⁵ Thus Rainerio da Pisa describes *sensualitas*, following Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* liber 2 distinctio 24, as “quedam vis animae inferior ex qua est motus qui intenditur in corporis sensus atque appetitus rerum ad corpus pertinentium” (*Pantheologia* 2:224v); *concupiscentia* as, at its worst, “appetitus sensitivi vel sensualitatis que est idem quod fomes inordinatus prout rationi repugnat: inclinans ad malum et faciens difficultatem ad bonum,” citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III qu.27 art. 3 (*ibid.*, 1:99v); and as cited earlier in chapter 2, *luxuria* is “inordinatus appetitus delectationis venere” (*ibid.*, 2:66r). See Payer’s discussion, *The Bridling of Desire*, 42–60.

⁶ *Sermones*, 60r–60v: “transmigrans a carnalibus ad spiritualia”; “nimius et superfluus,” citing a lost work of Seneca; “amore casto et ordinato.” See Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, 120–122 on this *locus* from Seneca in medieval morality. Dini’s reference to elephants underlines the need to abstain from sex during pregnancy and nursing: “Unde dicitur de elephantibus quod femina portat fetum per duos annos et per quattuor lactat, ita quod masculus non iungitur feminem per sextos annos.” Giovanni da San Gimignano also stresses in more general terms the example of elephants in sexual morality: *S.ex.* 5.60: “Non enim se cognoscunt nisi in abdito: et hoc non nisi in duobis annis quando masculus habet quinque annos et femina decem: in istis duobus annis non nisi quinque diebus sexto raro adiuncto. In quo exemplo docentur homines coniugali opere honeste ut quantum ad ad [*sic*] locum et quantum ad tempus et quantum ad charitatem.”

⁷ *Specchio della croce*, Newberry MS, 5r (ch. 2): “Come Christo in croce trae et ordina lo nostro amore . . .”; see also 74v.

by subjecting nature to lust [*luxuria*]; Rainerio refers to Gregory, recording that when sensual desire [*concupiscentia*] “exceeds the limits of reason, insofar is it against human nature.”⁸ Boccaccio and Petrarch conceive humanity differently, in a way less dependent on this claim of a stable psychology and epistemology. For the Dominicans however the Fall and original sin first violated the order of human nature. In the words of Giovanni:

... by [Adam’s] transgression and sin the innocence of the first state is broken, because entire human nature gives way and becomes disordered and infected by original sin. And original sin is a certain inordinate disposition in man, which springs forth from the unravelling of the harmony and concord that was in the first parent. For man in the state of nature was perfectly subject to God; and the sensual part [of the soul] was perfectly subject to reason; and other creatures were perfectly subject to man himself.⁹

The anxious emphasis on order and restraint in the fourteenth-century mendicant treatises arises from the high fear of their imminent collapse. If moral order was a concern for earlier theologians, the fear of these Dominicans may have been sharpened by the historical circumstances of the Avignon displacement, plague, and the rising lay merchant class. In turn the humanists pose an alternative conception of ethics free from the clergy’s metaphysical preconceptions, one that might resolve this anxiety for order, if only to foster other concerns.

In the eyes of the clergy, original sin incites the insubordination of the senses. Referring to Augustine’s *On Free Will*, Rainerio defines *libido* as an “inordinate love,” and states “through the *libido* of original sin many things are corrupt and disordered.”¹⁰ This corruption entails both reason and will and consequently “all inferior powers

⁸ *Specchio* 66r (c.26); *Pantheologia* 2:58r (*Libido* c.17): “concupiscentia . . . est homini naturalis in quantum subditur rationi: in quantum autem excedit limites rationis: intantum est contra naturam hominis.”

⁹ *Sermones funebres*, d.2.s.4: “. . . ex eius transgressione et peccato interrupta est innocentia primi status: quod subtracta deordinata est tota natura humana: et peccato originale infecta. Peccatum enim originale est quaedam inordinata dispositio in homine: quae procedit ex dissolutione armonie et concordie quae erat in primo parente. quod homo in statu innocentie perfecte subditus erat deo: et pars sensitiva perfecte erat subdita rationi: et creature alie subdite erat ipsi homini.”

¹⁰ *Pantheologia*, 2:56r (c.1): “inordinatus amor”; 2:57r (c.8): “quod per libidinem peccati originalis corrupta et deordinata sunt multa.”

of both soul and body.”¹¹ Following the mendicant argument it is easy to understand why the Dominicans stress that “concupiscence clouds and perverts the judgment of reason,” why “fornication is naturally the death of the soul.” As fasting, according to the *Legenda aurea*, should control the “harmful fluid of voluptuousness in us,” so the priest to Passavanti should be free from the disorder of sensual desires.¹² The psychological, the moral, and the sexual order form the nexus of the mendicant instruction, and we witness this convergence most vividly in their treatment of the feminine.

In his discussion of the Fall, Rainerio cites Augustine to support his claim that the serpent first inclined woman “in the desire of sin” [*in affectum peccati*]. Woman’s closer affiliation with *affectum* or emotion is clear, according to Rainerio, from Augustine’s *On the Trinity*, where “he compares or relates woman to lower [inferior] reason” and from his *Against the Manichaeans*, where “sensuality is under reason and obeys it.”¹³ But whereas Augustine understands the figure of Eve primarily as representing a feature of human psychology, one indeed subordinate to the ‘masculine,’ higher *ratio*,¹⁴ Rainerio and other

¹¹ *Pantheologia*, 2:57r (c.8), citing Thomas, *Commentary on Sentences* 1.2 d.31.a.1: “omnes anime vires interiores et anime et corporis.”

¹² *Pantheologia*, 1:100r: “concupiscentia obnubilat et pervertit iudicium rationis”; Cavalca, *Vite dei Padri* c.132, p. 207: “fornicazione naturalmente è morte dell’anima”; *The Golden Legend* c.35 (Ember Day Fasts), p.139. See Passavanti, *Sermones*, 77r re: fasting and purgation of “superfluis humoribus”; *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 125.

¹³ *Pantheologia*, 2:225r. “Mulierem vero comperavit vel assimilavit inferiori rationi”; “sensualitas subiicitur rationi et obedit.”

¹⁴ See Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manicheos*, c.11 (*PL* 34, col. 204–205): “Adhuc enim erat, quod fieret, ut non solum anima corpori dominaretur, quia corpus servilem locum obtinet, sed etiam virilis ratio subjugaret sibi animalem partem suam, per quod adiutorium imperaret corpori. Ad hujus rei exemplum femina facta est, quam rerum ordo subjugat viro; ut quod in duobus hominibus evidentius apparet, id est in masculo et femina, etiam in uno homine considerari possit: ut appetitum animae, per quem de membris corporis operamur, habeat mens interior tanquam virilis ratio subjugatum, et justa lege modum imponat adiutorio suo, sicut vir debet feminam regere, nec eam permittere dominari in virum; quod ubi contingit, perversa et misera domus est.” See also ch. 14, col. 207: Etiam nunc in unoquoque nostrum nihil aliud agitur, cum ad peccatum quisque delabitur, quam tunc actum est in illis tribus, serpente, muliere, et viro. Nam primo fit suggestio sive per cogitationem, sive per sensus corporis, vel videndo, vel tangendo, vel audiendo, vel gustando, vel olfaciendo: quae suggestio cum facta fuerit, si cupiditas nostra non movebitur ad peccandum, excludetur serpentis astutia; si autem mota fuerit, quasi mulieri jam persuasum erit. Sed aliquando ratio viriliter etiam commotam cupiditatem refrenat atque compescit. Quod cum fit, non labimur in peccatum, sed cum aliquanta luctatione coronamur. Si autem ratio consentiat, et quod libido commoverit, faciendum esse decernat, ab omni vita beata tanquam de paradiso expellitur homo. Jam enim peccatum imputatur, etiamsi non subsequatur factum; quoniam rea tenetur in consensione conscientia.”

Trecento mendicants see the problem to lie also in women themselves, since they contaminate with desire, provoking disorder. Lust or *luxuria* is an emotion “not ruled by the counsel of reason” and women embody this *luxuria*: “Thirdly deviant contact incites and provokes lust. Hence the apostle in I Cor. VII says that ‘It is good for man not to touch a woman,’ for this reason, because an unclean thing cannot be touched unless what is touching it becomes defiled. Woman however is an unclean thing.” Rainerio cites further in this context Eccl. XIII: “Who would touch the pitch is soiled by it”: “for pitch is hot, bitter, black and foul, like woman or *luxuria*.”¹⁵ It is fitting that Rainerio ends his entry on *luxuria* by quoting Jerome, who declares the greatest danger to the spiritual life to be “the feminine arms of the devil” [*arma diaboli femina*].¹⁶ Recalling the downfall of David, Samson, and Solomon, and the loss of paradise, Jerome asks, “If a woman deceived these men, who is secure [*tutus*]?” In the mendicant use of the sea-metaphor it is the clergy who are to provide the laity with a harbor safe [*tutus*] from the storms of sin and confusion; so too is the believer to take refuge through their counsel from the peril of feminine nature.

These sentiments on feminine wiles and temptation find their way into vernacular writings. What Boccaccio sees as the source of delight and intrigue, the mendicants view as placing one’s salvation at great risk. Bartolomeo pronounces in his *Teachings* that lust [*lussuria*] “induces mental chaos” [“fa tempesta di mente”] and cites as an authority Jerome’s *Contra Iovinianum*, although he distorts his source: “love of woman is a loss of reason and next to madness, and in no way accords with the character of a wise man.”¹⁷ The Dominican confessor

¹⁵ *Pantheologia*, 2:66v: “affectus non regitur consilio rationis”; 2:66r (*luxuria*, c.3): “Tertio incitat et provocat ad luxuriam tactus lubricus. Unde apostolus . . . ad Chorointh. vii. sic dicit Bonum est homini mulierem non tangere. Ratio autem huius est: quia res immunda tangi non potest quin inquinetur tangens. Mulier autem est res immunda. . . unde Ecc. xiii. Qui tangerit picem coninquinabitur ab ea. . . Picem: quae est calida: amara: nigra: et fedā. Sic mulier vel luxuria.” See also 2:254v: “stulticia oritur ex luxuria velut ex matre filia.”

¹⁶ *Pantheologia*, 2:67r: “periculissima arma diaboli femina,” with “arms” also meaning “weapons.” He adds: “Et iterum Hiero. Non potest cum domino toto corde habitare: qui feminarum accessibus copulatur. . . Memento quod paradisi colonum mulier de sua possessione eiecerit. Si femina tales decept: modo quis tutus erit?”

¹⁷ *Ammaestramenti*, 225 (d.25 c.1 no. 3): “. . . amare di femmina dimenticato di ragione e prossimo a pazzia, e per niuno modo si conviene all’animo de’ savi.” See *Adversus Iovinianum libri duo*, 1.49: “Amor formae, rationis oblivio est, et insaniae proximus: foedum minimeque conveniens animo sospiti vitium” (PL 23, 280C), my emphasis. Since there is no critical addition of the *Ammaestramenti*, it would be interesting to see how many citations of this sort occur. Jerome for his part cites Aristotle,

likewise relies almost solely on Jerome and ecclesiastical writers in maintaining that one should abstain from the company of women.¹⁸

Bartolomeo more fully articulates his deep mistrust of the feminine in distinction 35: “On the vices of women,” especially chapter 1: “That woman [*la femmina*] is the root of evils [*capo de’ mali*].” He brings forth Origen, Chrysostom, even an allusion to a “philosopher” in order to persuade the lay reader that “sin begins with woman,” that woman is a “man’s confusion, an insatiable beast” or “wicked nature painted with the color of goodness.”¹⁹ This chapter associates the feminine with the Fall, moral disorder, and seduction or deception, all attributes that the mendicant Latin writings elaborate in a more explicitly theological framework.

Through their effort to color vividly the crisis of sin, the clerical vernacular writings, especially the *exempla*, turn to the physical features of feminine allure. Boccaccio’s *Decameron* also focuses acutely on corporal charm, as in Emilia’s ballad, but resists the moralizing predisposition of the Dominicans. The *Teachings* of Bartolomeo however translate the claim by Innocent III that “through the face of a woman many have already perished.”²⁰ Cavalca’s *Lives of the Fathers* provides a number of *exempla* in which a demon or “spirit of fornication” appears in feminine guise to seduce the unwary, or in which a woman is used by the devil for the same end. A prostitute’s beauty is called “a devil’s snare”; a “holy virgin” perceives her “unparalleled beauty” as so dangerous to those who see her that she, out of piety, secludes herself from society.²¹ The devout resistance of one young

Plutarch and Seneca as his authorities, in context of praising feminine modesty. He thereafter adduces Plato’s *Phaedrus* and Seneca for a critique on the frenzy of love (PL 23, 280D).

¹⁸ *Ammaestramenti*, 236–238 (d.25 c.10).

¹⁹ *Ammaestramenti*, 286 (d.35 c.1 no. 2): “*Ecclesiastico*: Da femmina cominciamento è di peccati [a reference to *Eccl.* 25.33]. . . . no. 5: *Secondo filosofo*: . . . confusione d’uomo, non sazievole bestia . . . no. 5 [sic]; *Gristostomo sopra Matteo*: . . . natura di male dipinto per color di bene.” The *filosofo* is probably not Aristotle, as he is cited elsewhere in this treatise by name. Bartolomeo also cites the plays of Seneca and Terence here, but not Seneca’s moral writings.

²⁰ *Ammaestramenti*, 233 (d.25 c.7 no. 7): “per faccia de femmina molti sono già periti.”

²¹ *Vite de’ Padri*, 206a (c.129); 208 (c.133): “Io sono lo spirito della fornicazione, la quale nel cuore degli uomini stolti paio dolce. . . .”; 213 (c.143); 203a (c.125): “. . . meretrice . . . era per la sua bellezza lacciuolo del diavolo a perdizione di molte anime”; 119a (c.29): “una santa vergine. . . . era di sì smisurata bellezza che gran pericolo era a vederla; per la qual cosa ella, siccome santissima, si nasconde e fugia di non comparire fra la gente per non scandalizzare altrui per la sua bellezza.”

man, however, allows him to see the spirit of fornication in her true physical form, with a resemblance to that of Rainerio's depiction of lust and woman: black, "foul," and "most disgusting."²² With his more overt linguistic concerns, Passavanti discusses in his *Mirror of True Penitence* how the devil entraps an aged hermit through the disguise of a young girl, tempting him not merely by her bashful actions but also by her manner of speech: "speaking pleasing words about one thing and the next, as devilish wickedness knows to compose with a feminine voice."²³ As the faithful should recognize the clergy through their *opere* and *parole*, action and word, so too should they discern the nature of temptation in the guise of a feminine persona.

Yet if women are featured as objects of desire or the forces of seduction, they conversely figure as more easily succumbing to desire as well. We have seen the association of woman, weakness and mobility in our analysis of the sea-metaphor. Bartolomeo speaks of feminine vacillation, and Giovanni da San Gimignano recommends seclusion and walls to protect the fragility of the sex.²⁴ There is something miraculous, Giovanni says, about a chaste woman, given her innate feminine frailties.²⁵ Passavanti warns confessors to take special care with female penitents, lest their questions perversely serve to arouse a woman's sensual desire. According with this sentiment, Dini claims in his sermon on marriage that women must be watched more than men, "because woman is weaker and more susceptible to the confusion of the world."²⁶ In spiritual terms, woman with her emotional material was both dangerous and endangered, requiring the oversight of

²² *Vite de' Padri*, 208b (c.133): "... gli apparva una etiopessa sì fetente e laidissima che non la poteva sofferire de vedere onde la cacciava da sè; ma quella innanzichè si partisse, gli disse: Io sono spirito della fornicazione . . . ma, per la tua ubbidienza e per la fatica che sostieni, non m'ha permesso Iddio d'ingannarti, ma hatti in verità mostrato la mia laidezza e 'l mio fetore."

²³ *Specchio*, 209–210: "... parlando d'una cosa e d'altra piacevoli, come la diabolica malizia colla lingua femminile sapea acconciare. . . ."

²⁴ *Ammaestramenti*, 287 (d.35 c.2): "Che le femmine sono mobili"; *S.fun.*, d.5 s.13. See also Cavalca's translation of Jerome's letter to Eustochia, perhaps translated for the Pisan sisters under his care: MS BNF, Magliabechiano 39.85, 3v: "... se salvare civogliamo cichonvien fugire lavicinanza et lamista demondani et ongni chagone di pechato e richoverare allatezza della vita perfetta."

²⁵ *S.fun.*, d.5 s.4.

²⁶ *Specchio della vera penitenza*, 135–138, citing the *exemplum* of Beatrice of Cologne; *Sermones*, 61r: "Non tunc viro sed mulieri custodia est anhibenda et hoc secundum augustinum quia mulier et infirmior et mundi confusione maior." Dini cites Augustine for support.

the masculine *ratio*, whereby reason stood above, looking at the distance from the soul's summit.

The mendicant accounts of the Fall portray feminine insufficiency in a reduplicated way. "Woman was the first and incomplete beginning of sin," writes Giovanni, "but man the next and complete beginning," since "woman sinned from ignorance, man however from certain knowledge." Yet this ignorance and weakness hardly mitigates Eve's fault; on the contrary it composes a culpable element in her being deceived. Eve was seduced by being elated by the serpent's words to her, "and therefore such ignorance does not excuse but aggravates sin. . . . Her elation was greater than that of Adam."²⁷ The *Golden Legend* quantifies feminine sinfulness when discussing the feast of Purification of the Virgin: the female fetus takes twice as long to form than the male, since "the woman has sinned more than the man" and has "weari'd God more" with her greater sin.²⁸ To Cavalca and his fellow Dominicans, however, God made good use of the feminine proclivity to human weakness and deception, in order to amend the consequences of the Fall. Cavalca's *Mirror of the Cross* records that since the devil tricked Eve, Christ deceived the devil about his divine nature by being born of an unmarried woman, "with all our defects."²⁹ These writings therefore attribute a theological economy to femininity that is predicated upon woman's spiritual and emotional pliancy and submissiveness.

We have seen Petrarch acknowledge, if reluctantly, his own emotional susceptibility as part of his *humanitas*, and his view of the feminine, particularly Laura, underlines its essential importance. Boccaccio begins his *Decameron* by declaring his near-shipwreck on love's waters and by expressing compassion for women who struggle emotionally in seclusion. Their mendicant contemporaries consider the feminine

²⁷ *S.fun.*, d.2 s.4: "... mulier fuit initium primum et incompletum [peccati]; sed vir fuit initium proximum et completum"; "mulier peccavit ex ignorantia: vir autem ex certa scientia."; "... ista seductio quod eva seducta est: ex precedente elatione processit. Et ideo talis ignorantia non excusavit sed aggravavit peccatum. . . . maior fuit elatio eius quam ade. . . ."

²⁸ *The Golden Legend*, 1:144. See also Giovanni's *Sermones funebres*, d.1 s.2: "homo natus est principio fragili. s. ex mulier. et etiam ex materia corruptioni et putredini apta."

²⁹ *Specchio della croce*, Newberry MS, 77r: "E pero chel diavolo avea ingannato la prima femena, mostro [Christ] la soa sapiencia ingannando lui. Onde volse nassere d'femena desponsata e prendere carne con tuti i nostri defeti, acio chel diavolo nol conosesse."

in its fragility to represent a moral crossroads. As a figure for the religious soul, it may be either spouse or adulteress, incline to continence or to lust.³⁰

Giovanni da San Gimignano examines the psychological symbolism of the feminine in detail in his *Summa de exemplis*. “The holy soul” (*anima sancta*) may be likened to the feminine, since women are more naturally compassionate (*pia*), maternal, and love more strongly than men. The souls of the saints, on account of their humility, integrity, and chastity, are similar to young girls or feminine innocence.³¹ Feminine emotional receptivity becomes a positive attribute when the soul is devoted to God. In much more extensive terms, however, does Giovanni compare feminine nature to the sinful soul (*anima peccatrix*). For, like a fallen soul, a woman possesses an inconstant and vacillating character, liable to being deceived; she naturally has fragility of mind and body, susceptible to all temptation; she is too desirous of beauty, speaks too often, is slow to act, prone to rages, holds grudges, is prey to jealousy and lust, has malice, shirks work, falters in hope, tells many lies, and easily loses her modesty. Furthermore a pregnant woman may be compared to a soul bearing evil. For her morning sickness is like a bad conscience, and the pains of birth symbolize a punishment for sin. A woman pregnant with a female child is the clearest *exemplum* for this soul. Reflecting the attitude pronounced in the *Golden Legend*, Giovanni cites Aristotle as an authority that a woman who has conceived a male child is prettier and happier than one carrying a female child: “by a male child is understood a good work, by female a wicked work. . . . For the female or evil work is unclean, foul and difficult.”³²

³⁰ Cavalca, *Specchio della croce*, Newberry MS, 76r, citing Hugh of St. Victor; *Leggenda aurea* 1:71–72.

³¹ *S.ex.* 6.7: “Item anima sancta decet assimilari mulieri. Primo quidem quia mulier est naturaliter pia. Nam mulier maioris pietatis est quam viro et cito lachrymas fundit. . . . mulier est vehementer amativa: magis enim diligit quam vir. . . . mulier est circa fetum sollicita. . . .”; “Anime sanctorum virum similes sunt puellae. . . . 5. . . . quia secundum nominis significationem sunt parve: integre: honeste et pure.”

³² *Loc. cit.* Giovanni lists three associations of *mulier* with *anima sancta*, fifteen with *anima peccatrix*, and three connotations of *mulier pregnantis* with *anima operantis malum*: “Per masculum ergo intelligitur opus bonum: per feminam vero opus malum. . . . Econtra autem femina [id est] opus malum est immundum fetidum et onerosum. Et anima operantur malum est similis mulieri gigenti filiam feminam.”

Mendicants conceive of the feminine in light of their model of moral psychology, as representing the lower powers of the soul that either submit to or rebel against the guidance of reason and grace. The Virgin Mary, we have seen, occupies a special place as an *exemplum* for the pure mistress of the soul. In discussing the Assumption of the Virgin, Giovanni addresses its wondrous aspect with regard to the female sex, clarifying how the feminine, more than any other symbol, represents the moral burden facing the Christian believer:

Thirdly the Assumption is miraculous if we consider her sex, because she is a woman. For truly it is amazing that a woman would appear in heaven, even as a woman expelled man from Paradise. But note that the blessed Virgin is called a woman due only to her sex, not to the weakness of her body. . . . Again she is called a woman through the fecundity of children, not through the fragility of character. . . . Again not from the multitude of sinners by one who was the city's whore, but rather from the singularity of her virtue.³³

Giovanni therefore contrasts Eve with Mary as the two competing choices in the believer's soul, with Mary most blessed for overcoming the weaknesses inherent in the human moral condition, weaknesses largely circumscribed as feminine. Though articulated for fourteenth-century preachers and their audience, this vision of the feminine is not far removed from Abelard's praise of Heloise in his last personal letter to her: "Nor would you have been more than a woman, whereas now you rise even above men, and have turned the curse of Eve into the blessing of Mary."³⁴

The feminine attributes of the soul, like women in the world without, represent one's tendency to infidelity or devotion, cruelty or compassion, immersion in the world or loyalty to God. Mary is the soul's mediator [*mediatrix*] because she is miraculously "liberated" from sensual impulses, according to Rainerio;³⁵ she is merciful especially toward those who seek her in penitence and distress, as the

³³ *S.ex.* 7.4: "Tertio assumpta est mirabiliter quod apparet si consideremus sexum quia mulier. Mirum enim est valde quod mulier appareat in celo que hominem expulit de paradiso. Sed nota quod beata virgo dicitur mulier descretionem sexus: non corporis fractione. . . . Item dicitur mulier prolis fecunditate non mentis fragilitate. . . . Item non ex peccatorum multiplicitate que erat in civitate peccatrix: sed potius ex virtutum singularitate."

³⁴ *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Middlesex: Penguin, 1974), 150. Nohac remarks that Petrarch had the letters of Abelard and Heloise in his library and recorded personal marginal comments: *Petrarque et l'humanisme*, 2:219–223.

³⁵ *Pantheologia*, 2:226r: "que fuit miracolose a fomita liberata".

exempla demonstrate in Passavanti's *Mirror of True Penitence* and in the collections of the Marian miracle-stories. One of the legends of the Virgin clearly shows these contrasting choices and tendencies figured through the guise of the feminine. Since this *exemplum* can be juxtaposed to Boccaccio's story of Griselda (*Dec.* X.10), it deserves careful analysis.

The legend recounts how the Frankish emperor remarries after having lost his first wife in childbirth. The new empress is considered the most beautiful woman in the world, but she becomes jealous when her stepdaughter, the child of the first wife, is renowned for even greater beauty. Spurred by the devil, the empress orders that the girl be taken to a deserted place and killed, the servants being told that they should bring the girl's hands to her as proof of her death. The princess prays to the Virgin and the servants out of pity spare her life, but nonetheless cut off her hands. The son of a duke finds her. Without knowing her true identity, he falls in love and marries her on account of her beauty and wisdom. For his part the emperor, attempting to assuage his grief, hosts a tournament in which the young duke carries the field. At the same time the aggrieved princess gives birth to twin sons. The empress, upon hearing of the hero's beautiful wife without hands, suspects the truth, and forges a letter to the elder duke in his son's name that accuses the princess of adultery and demands the immediate execution of the princess and her children. Abandoned once again as prey to wild animals, the princess beseeches the Virgin for aid and discovers a saintly hermitage, where the Virgin speaks to her and replaces her lost earthly hands with celestial ones. Her husband then finds her and their children and returns them to court. The princess, no longer wishing to keep her identity a secret, declares to all assembled: "I am the unfortunate daughter of the Emperor. Through the jealousy of his wicked Queen I have suffered such evils, but through the grace of the glorious Virgin Mary I have escaped her wickedness." The emperor is overjoyed at hearing of his daughter's survival, and consigns the jealous empress to the flames.³⁶

³⁶ *Miracoli*, cap. XI. ". . . io sono la sventurata figliuola dellomperadore la quale per invidia della malvagia regina o sostenuti tanti mali ma perla gratia della gloriosa vergine maria. Io sono scampata della sua malignitade." This *exemplum* is the first of Ezio Levi's edition of *Il libro dei cinquanta miracoli della vergine*, which he dates to the Veneto in the first half of the fourteenth century (xcix-cii, 4-9). Levi sees

The *Miracoli-exemplum* demonstrates in narrative the two aspects of the feminine as argued by the mendicants: on the one side spiritual compassion and patience, shown by Mary and the wronged princess, and on the other side worldly jealousy and cruelty, inspired by the devil and displayed by her stepmother. The Queen of Heaven stands off against the Queen of the Empire, and the beneficent Lady preserves her devotée, restoring her to full health and home. For her suffering and piety the princess evokes compassion among those she encounters and garners her just reward.

Based upon the ‘mirroring’ or reflexive act of reading *exemplum* analyzed in chapter three, the Trecento reader may see herself or himself on two levels. The most direct example to follow is that of the princess, who despite all outward unjust tribulation retains and strengthens her devotion through Mary to God.³⁷ This type of identification between reader and protagonist is what Petrarch stresses when translating in his last years Boccaccio’s story of Griselda. On a second level, the reader may understand the battle between the cruel and the compassionate Queens as her or his own psychological drama, in which the feminine pliancy or susceptibility of the soul is drawn either to darkness or to light. Worldly concerns and sensual passions typically drown the soul unless, by gracious reprieve, reason may reign to order its impulses and pilot it to salvation. It is on this deeper, more psychological level that Boccaccio’s final tale of Griselda may be read, even as the tale contests the mendicant moral perspective.

The *Decameron* responds to the mendicant perspective with characteristic subtlety and irony, transferring, in the way of these humanists, the weight of authoritative understanding to the listener and reader. The Dominican moral dicta strive for clarity, along the lines of scholastic *manifestatio*;³⁸ Boccaccio, along with Petrarch, works in

the source of this story in the miracle of *Manikine* from the late 13th century (cix–cx). The princess’s speech is somewhat shorter in the Veneto version. For Boccaccio’s knowledge of the Miracle-stories, see Levi, liii–liv.

³⁷ See Levi’s reference to the effect of the Miracle-stories on the blessed Giovanni Colombini, who was introduced to them in 1355 by his wife (*ibid.*, xcvi–xcviii). See also the article by Ruth Chavasse, “The Virgin Mary: Consoler, Protector and Social Worker in Quattrocento Miracle Tales” in Letizia Panizza, ed., *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 138–164.

³⁸ See Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York: Meridian, 1985), 28–35. Panofsky defines the principle of *manifestatio* as “the postulate of clarification for clarification’s sake” (*Gothic Architecture*, 35).

the realm of ambiguity, in the spirit of “dialectical imitation” toward the mendicants and their authorities, clerical and classical.³⁹ This approach, we have seen, requires a different manner of reading, one that is more open, patient, and less prone to moral judgment. For it is in the nature of human experience, in their view, for judgments to be contingent and provisional, and the reader must allow for shifts of perspective on the part of both the writer and himself, as both experience life and learning in temporal continuum and flux. Deceptions and self-deceptions, the ironic trip, lie around the corner. The clerical calling, by contrast, presupposes an absolute rectitude of conduct and vision antithetical to the temporal, subjective awareness of the humanists. The contrast of perspectives and approaches toward the feminine lends critical contours to the basic cultural and philosophical difference between these two groups. For the humanists, the feminine symbolizes the contingency of experience central to their enterprise, and so unsettling to the method of the mendicants.

When discussing Boccaccio’s view of the feminine it is appropriate to begin with Filomena’s statement in the Introduction. Having assembled in Santa Maria Novella, the seven women discuss their plans for exile, and are about to leave on their own, following Pampinea’s counsel, when Filomena speaks out in contradiction:

Recall that we are all women, and none of us is such a girl as not to know well how reasonable women are together and how, without the supervision of some man, they can regulate themselves. We are fickle, quarrelsome, mistrustful, weakminded and fearful. . . .⁴⁰

The reader sees Filomena address feminine nature in terms pronounced by the preachers of Santa Maria Novella: “fickle” [*mobile*], “fearful” [*paurose*], in need of masculine authority. Elissa immediately seconds her position, stating: “Truly men are the heads set over women and without their order [*l’ordine*] rarely does any effort of ours end with praise.”⁴¹ Men are to put an order onto women’s

³⁹ See Greene, *Light in Troy*, 45–47. Greene discusses parody as a “boundary of dialectical imitation” (46) without citing Boccaccio.

⁴⁰ Intro.74–75: “Ricordivi che noi siamo tutte femine, e non ce n’ha niuna sì fanciulla, che non possa ben conoscere come le femine sien ragionate insieme e senza la provedenza d’alcuno uomo si sappiano regolare. Noi siamo mobili, riotose, sospettose, pusillanime e paurose. . . .”

⁴¹ Intro.76: “Veramente gli uomini sono delle femine capo e senza l’ordine loro rade volte riesce alcuna nostra a laudevole fine.” The first phrase echoes *Ephesians* 5:23, as noted by Branca (*Decameron*, 1:38).

actions, as reason is to regulate emotion. The moral hierarchy of the clergy finds its social correlate.

But it would be surprising if Boccaccio did not subject this statement of conventional wisdom to ironic reversal, as we have examined in the study of *exempla*. For when Neifile then questions whether the company of three young men should compromise their *onestà*, Filomena answers in words that proclaim her self-reliance:

This concern is misplaced; wherever I live with decorum [*onestamente*] my conscience does not chasten me for any reason, let one say what one will to the contrary: God and truth would take up arms in my defense.⁴²

Far from being fearful and fickle, Filomena takes charge of the situation and persuades the others to consent. Her initial indictment of female weakness must not be read at face value, for it stands in contradiction to her actions and speech.⁴³ Perhaps she is seeking male companionship, not male leadership, for the journey, and is using moral platitudes as a ruse toward this end. As we shall see, Boccaccio consistently undercuts the preceptive moral subordination of the feminine, often by creating individual stories whose endings question this morality and the way it is practiced. In its stead the *Decameron* regards the feminine associations of transience and the emotions, especially love, cruelty and compassion, as integral qualities of ethical development. We may trace these associations and the way they are conveyed by looking at several stories that concern themselves with the general relationship between men and women, and masculine and feminine nature.

These stories include II.9, the tale of Bernabò and Zinevra of Genoa; VIII.7, the vindictive affair between the widow Elena and the scholar Rinieri; IX.9, Solomon's advice to Joseph and Melissus about shrewish wives and love; and X.10, the closing narrative of the marriage between Gualtieri and Griselda. Similar to the tales of the first day, each story may be read as a response to previous ones. They present the reader or listener with various perspectives on the problematic of the feminine, and move him to frame an individual

⁴² Intro.84: "Questo non monta niente; là dove io onestamente viva né mi rimorda d'alcuna cosa la coscienza, parli chi vuole in contrario: Idio e la verità l'arme per me prenderanno."

⁴³ This revision is overlooked by Claude Cazalé Bérard in her assessment of the *Decameron's* misogyny: "Filoginia/misoginia" in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 125.

interpretation colored by the speaker's personality and his own experience. This individual, subjective appreciation, that deepens one's emotional sensitivity over time, is a basic 'feminine' aspect of Boccaccio's humanism, which he shared with Petrarch.

The story of Bernabò the Genoese merchant and his wife Zinevra begins with a quarrel and a wager between Bernabò and a fellow merchant, Ambruogiolo. Bernabò boasts of his wife's beauty, ability, and chastity. Ambruogiolo claims he will be able to seduce her and provide him with proof. He manages to spy her while she is sleeping, and Bernabò, convinced of his wife's infidelity, is so enraged that he orders her execution. His servant however spares her life and eventually, in masculine disguise, she gains the notice of the Sultan. She is able to expose Ambruogiolo's deception and rejoins her fooled husband. The Sultan commands Ambruogiolo to suffer a lingering death in the hot sun amid biting flies.

It is fitting that this story about female rectitude is told by Filomena, who at the *Decameron's* outset offered her poorer assessment of feminine nature. Filomena has the fraudulent Ambruogiolo, in his debate with Bernabò, offer the conventional critique of the weakness of women: "The nature of things," he tells him, requires "that man is the noblest animal created by God among mortal creatures, and then woman"; man, being "more perfect," has greater firmness of character than woman, who is "naturally fickle" [*mobile*] and prey to seduction.⁴⁴ Here Ambruogiolo draws upon the mendicant conception of feminine inferiority to advance his argument. Bernabò recognizes his conception as scholarly when he replies, "I am a merchant and not a philosopher, and will respond as a merchant."⁴⁵ But this idea is advanced by a deceiver, who in fact does not succeed at seducing the woman in question. Zinevra's character and reputation make him realize that Bernabò is justified in praising his wife and that he must resort to trickery to win the wager.⁴⁶ At the end Zinevra

⁴⁴ II.9.13, 15–16: "... tu hai poco riguardato all natura delle cose. . . . Io ho sempre inteso l'uomo essere il più mobile animale che tra' mortali fosse creato da Dio, e appresso la femina; ma l'uomo, sì come generalmente si crede e vede per opere, è più perfetto . . . senza alcun fallo dee avere più di fermezza e così ha, per ciò che universalmente le femine sono più mobile. . . . che spero tu che una donna, naturalmente mobile, possa fare a'pregghi, alle lusinghe, a' doni, a' mille altri modi che userà uno uom savio che l'ami?"

⁴⁵ II.9.18: "Io son mercatante e non filosofo, e come mercatante risponderò."

⁴⁶ II.9.24, 28.

harshly criticizes her foolish husband, because he “lent more credence to the lies of others than to the truth, which he should have known through long experience.”⁴⁷ In other words, Bernabò allows his jealousy to be inflamed by Ambruogio’s scholarly dicta concerning feminine frailty, rather than relying upon his own independent, personal knowledge about his wife’s virtue.

The contrast between theory and experience recalls Petrarch’s evaluation of authority. This *Decameron* story also upholds personal experience as the arbiter of authority. Filomena’s theme of “the dupe outwitting the deceiver” refers not only to Bernabò overcoming Ambruogio, as she intends, but also to Zinevra fooling both men and revealing their misappraisal of her character.⁴⁸ The last days of story-telling explore more extensively the mendicant view of women, feminine nature, and the emotional life. Pampinea recounts the affair between the widow and the scholar. Her tale, the longest of the hundred, picks up on Filomena’s theme of the deceiver deceived. While commentators have often characterized her story as exemplifying a misogynist or anti-feminist tendency in medieval literature,⁴⁹ another reader may ask whether this conclusion is itself deceptive, insofar as it is peremptory and does not account for the interplay of personalities among narrator, protagonist, and various storytellers among the ten Florentines.

Pampinea’s tale first describes the trick played by Elena upon Rinieri, a scholar who has fallen in love with her. She leaves him waiting in the locked frozen courtyard while she entertains her lover. In revenge, he waits until her lover has forsaken her, and then lures her to a tall tower in mid-summer, where she is forced, not unlike Ambruogio, to expose her naked body to the burning sun and flies.

True to the didacticism we witnessed in her story of the first day (I.10), Pampinea instructs the women that this tale should not be “without usefulness” in eliciting their compassion for the “just retribution” against a Florentine lady whose trickery was turned against her.⁵⁰ As in her story of Malgherida de’ Ghisolieri and the doctor,

⁴⁷ II.9.64: “. . . piú credulo alle altrui falsità che alla verità da lui per lunga esperienza potuta conoscere.”

⁴⁸ II.9.3: “lo ’ngannatore rimane a piè dello ’ngannato.”

⁴⁹ Branca, *Decameron*, 2:944 (VIII.7, n. 2); McWilliam, *The Decameron*, 854; Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 232.

⁵⁰ VIII.7.3: “. . . ma io intendo di farvi avere alquanto compassione d’una giusta retribuzione a una nostra cittadina renduta, alla quale la sua beffa presso che con

women should be cautious in employing their wiles against others. She reiterates this moral at the close: "And therefore be careful, ladies, with your tricks, especially those directed against scholars."⁵¹ The standing of the scholar is thus critical to the tale's moral, as seen by its narrator, who in order to emphasize her story's exemplary quality rarely uses the character's proper names, referring to them mostly as *lo scolare* and *la donna*. Yet her notion of the moral, as in I.10, is highly problematic and open to reversal. The tale may be read, and is understood by several of the *brigata*, more as a critique than a praise of scholarly knowledge.

Pampinea, for her part, focuses on the character of the scholar Rinieri. He has studied, she says, for a long time in Paris, "in order to know the reason of things and their causes."⁵² He possesses a theoretical knowledge of philosophy, as befits a gentleman, and not an applied or practical learning designed for mercantile ends.

"The wise scholar," however, is "entangled" [*incapestrati*] by his love for Elena, and "leaving his philosophical thoughts aside, set his entire mind on her."⁵³ Rinieri succumbs to the erotic charms of the widow, ignoring, it would seem, the warning from the mendicant preachers about losing one's reason through the allure of an "excessive" or "disordered" love.⁵⁴ The scholar later claims, moreover, to have recovered from her entrapment, after he tricks her to the tower: "but your charms no longer blind the eyes of my intellect."⁵⁵ Women, by contrast, are in his words "animals without intellect," failing to recognize what wickedness lies concealed behind an attractive façade.⁵⁶ The scholarly *ratio* has triumphed and brings feminine nature to submit; thanks to his ingenious plan, he has put the seductress in her proper place, literally exposed and naked to the world.

morte, essendo beffata, ritornò sopra il capo. E questo udire non sarà senza utilità di voi, per ciò che meglio di beffare altrui vi guarderete, e farete gran senno."

⁵¹ VIII.7.149: "E per ciò guardatevi, donne, dal beffare, e gli scolari specialmente." This echoes the scholar's own words in VIII.7.90.

⁵² VIII.7.5: "... per sapere la ragion delle cose e la cagion d'esse. . . ."

⁵³ VIII.7.6, 10: "Ma come spesso avviene coloro ne' quali è più l'avvedimento delle cose profonde più tosto da amore essere incapestrati. . . . [i] savio scolare, lasciati i pensier filosofici da una parte, tutto l'animo rivolse a costei. . . ."

⁵⁴ See however Pampinea's earlier statement in VII.6.3, about love sharpening one's wits.

⁵⁵ VIII.7.85: "... ma le tue lusinghe non m'adomberanno ora gli occhi dell'intelletto."

⁵⁶ VIII.7.104: "Voi [femine] non v'accorgete, animali senza intelletto, quanto di male sotto quella poca di bella apparenza stea nascoso."

If the reader or listener were to end her interpretation at this point, she would confirm Pampinea's moral and be edified in an uncomplicated way. But the women in the *brigata* feel a certain compassion for Elena, however "temperate" [*moderata*], and consider the scholar to be "rigid and fiercely insistent, indeed cruel".⁵⁷ Pampinea's attempt to round off the reading of the story with a moral fails once again, and their response points to internal inconsistencies within the tale, especially within the character of the scholar Rinieri.

Rinieri enjoys his debate with Elena, after he has trapped her on the tower. He tells her how he planned a "thousand snares" [*mille laccioli*] of revenge by pretending that he continued to love her, and how foolish she was to place her faith in the lover who abandoned her: "For young men are not content with one woman, but they desire and feel they deserve as many as they see, because their love cannot be stable, as you can now through experience [*per pruova*] most reliably testify."⁵⁸ In describing masculine nature—including his own—Rinieri uses terms that describe feminine character: deceptive, fickle, prone to desire.⁵⁹

The scholar, however, is unaware of this irony. He asseverates that women are prone to being tricked, yet he was deceived himself. Similar problems face his claim that "the eyes of [his] intellect" are now open, that he has reached a new level of self-awareness: "I know myself, and never so much when living in Paris compared to what you showed me in a single night at your house."⁶⁰ He contrasts scholarly authority to experience, asserts the latter's primacy, not unlike Zinevra in Filomena's tale: but what has he learned? The attentive reader sees another perspective on the relation between authority and experience that undermines reason's self-determination and claim to psychological sovereignty.

Rinieri's indictment of Elena is an angry, pedantic diatribe. She is akin to "wild animals" [*salvatiche fiere*]; he "knows" her now "not as a dove, but as a poisonous snake," which he intends "to perse-

⁵⁷ VIII.8.2: "rigido e costante fieramente, anzi crudele."

⁵⁸ VIII.7.98, 104: "Non sono i giovani d'una contenti, ma quante ne veggono tante ne disiderano, di tante par loro esser degni; per che non può stabile il loro amore, e tu ora ne puoi per pruova esser verissima testimonia."

⁵⁹ Rinieri will contrast youth and age, but he himself is young (VIII.7.5 "un giovane chiamato Rinieri").

⁶⁰ VIII.7.85: "... io mi conosco, né tanto di me stesso appurai mentre dimorai a Parigi, quanto tu in una sola notte delle tue mi facesti conoscere."

cute as the most ancient enemy with all hatred and every effort.”⁶¹ Contrary to his assertion of self-knowledge, Rinieri resorts to classifying Elena’s character in the schema of mendicant morality, going even further to demonize her through his allusion to the serpent from the Garden. He provides nothing original, individual, or spontaneous in his portrayal. His scholarly prejudices therefore limit and confirm his own sense of his experience. Far from perceiving the reality of his motives and actions, he is blinded by anger and justifies his hatred through a citation of feminine inferiority.

Rinieri’s call for hatred and force against Elena indicates that his reason or intellect is hardly in control of his behavior. The story in fact delineates the continuous influence of emotion upon his understanding. Employing a nice antithesis, Pampinea describes how Elena’s betrayal brings Rinieri into a somersault of passion: “he transformed his long and fervent love for her suddenly into crude and bitter hatred.”⁶² His need for revenge drives him to compose and carry out his plan, overcoming other human feelings. When he sees her walk naked to the tower unaware of her fate, he struggles, by dwelling upon his injuries, to suppress “a certain compassion” and sexual desire for her.⁶³ This battle between erotically-charged pity and punishment reaches its climax after her first distressing hours on the parapet, with revenge again gaining mastery:

The scholar, turning over with fierceness of mind the injury he received and seeing her tears and prayers, felt in his mind both pleasure and pain: pleasure in the vendetta that he had desired more than anything else, and sensible pain moving his humanity to take compassion on her suffering. Yet nonetheless, his humanity was not able to conquer the ferocity of passion [*fierezza dell’ appetito*]. . . .⁶⁴

⁶¹ VIII.7.87: “. . . te non colombe ma velenoso serpe conoscendo, come antichissimo nemicho con ogni odio e con tutta la forza di perseguire intendo. . . .” See his second comparison of the widow to a serpent in VIII.7.126.

⁶² VIII.7.40: “. . . sdegnato forte verso di lei, il lungo e fervente amor portatole subitamente in crudo e acerbo odio trasmutò . . .”

⁶³ Boccaccio’s description of this struggle itself lingers over her physical beauty, noting Rinieri’s response to it (VIII.7.66–67): “. . . e passondogli ella quasi alloto così ignuda e egli veggendo lei con la bianchezza del suo corpo vincere le tenebre delle notte e appresso riguardandole il petto e l’altre parti del corpo e vedendole belle e seco pensando quali infra piccol termine dovean divenire, sentí de lei alcuna compassione; e d’altra parte lo stimolo della carne l’assalí subitamente e fece tale in piè levare che si giaceva e confortavalo che egli da guato uscisse e lei andasse a prendere e il suo piacere ne facesse: e vincin fu a essere tra dall’uno e dall’altro vinto.”

⁶⁴ VIII.7.80: “Lo scolare, con fiero animo seco la ricevuta ingiuria rivolgendo e

In the contest between compassion and cruelty, cruelty wins out, and his humanity [*umanità*] is the poorer. We may recall the mendicant division of feminine nature, illustrated by the miracle-story of the girl without hands, in which these two sides, compassion and cruelty, fight for mastery in the soul and world at large. The *Decameron* internalizes this fight within Rinieri's soul, and the scholar succumbs, in mendicant terms, to the worst aspect of the feminine. Unlike the moral miracle narrative, the reader is allowed to observe this introspective, psychological dimension. The scholar's harsh invective against Elena and all women is an extension or projection of his own emotional bitterness. Rinieri condemns Elena for the very qualities—fierceness of desire, treachery, cruelty—that infect his own heart and mind. Closing himself to her plight he corroborates, through negative example, the opening principle of the *Decameron*, that “it is a very human thing to have compassion for those in distress.”

The terrible feature of Pampinea's story is not the widow's trick or the scholar's revenge, but the motives behind these acts: the heartlessness, the absence of compassion, that both characters share. Boccaccio illustrates, in contrast to the mendicants, that reason does not rule emotion, no matter a scholar's profession, and that the quality of compassion is not determined by theological dicta derived from Stoicism. The humanity of Boccaccio and Petrarch's humanism is sensitive to the existential plight of mortal, temporal life, in which both sufferer and consoler are implicated, upon which no one, clergy or lay, man or woman, may assert a final moral judgment. The tale plays upon the idea of disclosure through its use of the verb *scoprire* [to lay bare], with regard to love [VIII.7.15], secrets [93], honor and shame, even the sun's light [12, 74, 113]. Its greatest exposure is, typically for the *Decameron*, hidden from first sight: that of the scholar's blindness, who proclaims his superiority of reason over emotion when he is actually swayed by the darkest of passions. Rather than revealing the dominance of the *ratio*, as insisted by the mendicants in their model of moral psychology, Boccaccio's stories suggest that all human faculties, heart and mind, emotion and reason, must be integrated in order to achieve an ethical balance. They imply

veggendo piangere e pregare, a un'ora aveva piacere e noia nell'animo: piacere della vendetta la quale più che altra cosa desiderata avea, e noia sensitiva movendolo la umanità a compassion della misera; ma pur, non potendo la umanità vincere la ferezza dell'appetito, rispuose. . . .”

that instinct or emotion often prompts reason, and that a failure to heed the heart leads to ethical transgression.⁶⁵ Boccaccio's final vernacular novel, the *Corbaccio*, implies this idea even more strongly, for in this work both the narrator and his spirit guide pursue a vindictive crusade against the woman who wronged them, ironically attempting thereby to expiate the narrator's 'sin' of lust.⁶⁶

In the last two days of storytelling, two tales address the submissiveness, receptivity and suffering associated with the feminine. Emilia, Queen of the Ninth Day, recounts Solomon's advice to Joseph and Melissus. Dioneo closes the hundred stories with the narrative of the marriage between Gualtieri and Griselda. Both stories first reiterate and then question the convention of men 'ruling' women and reason reining passion.

⁶⁵ Or in the words of Montaigne, "these are two things that I have always observed to be in singular accord: supercelestial thoughts and subterranean conduct" (*Complete Works*, 856; essay III.13). Though reached independently, this assessment of VIII.7 agrees in some measure with the views expressed by Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Last Fiction: "Il Corbaccio"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 18–23, who in turn cites Millicent Marcus, "Misogyny as Misreading: A Gloss on *Decameron* VIII.7" (*Stanford Italian Review* 4, no. 1 [Spring 1984]: 23–40). I disagree with certain aspects of Hollander's analysis, for example that Rinieri and Elena are "two victims of uncontrolled appetites" and that they are prompted by envy of the other's happiness (21). Both are clearly responsible for following their "appetites" and their motive is closer to *Schadenfreude* or vindictiveness than to envy. Marcus places the story in context of medieval antifeminist pronouncements (Andreas Capellanus, *Roman de la Rose*, and others), stating well that Boccaccio "stands back and judges his vindictive scholar and through him exposes the inadequacy of the antifeminist mode as a basis of literary creation" (27), to which one might add "as a basis of moral judgment." Her reading of Rinieri's antifeminism as "simply a rechanneling of frustrated libidinal drives" (35) is however off the mark, since he has more than one opportunity to satisfy his lust with Elena, but chooses to indulge in cruelty instead. Neither critic reads the *Decameron* in relation to the way the humanists confront contemporary moral thought, a way that articulates an alternative philosophical and psychological perspective.

⁶⁶ Hollander emphasizes that the *Corbaccio* is a "work about a man who is out of control" (18), and that its diatribe against women is designed to show the irrationality of its protagonists. He follows up therefore on Anthony Cassell's observations on the inconsistencies of the work: see his translation and edition of the *Corbaccio* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1975), xxi–xxvi. Hollander cites another seminal article on the *Corbaccio*'s satire, that of Gian Piero Barricelli: "Satire of Satire: Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*" in *Italian Quarterly* 18, no. 72 (Spring 1975): 95–111. Hollander also notes that *Decameron* VIII.7 is the precursor to the *Corbaccio*. I would add a caveat to the way Hollander describes the careful artistic form of the *Corbaccio*. Even though, as he states, the guide's diatribe against women and in particular the widow are only two sections of the work, they are the central, longest and most salacious parts of the work. The relation between the *Corbaccio* and the *Secretum* has yet to be explored, but it is possible to read Boccaccio's work as an ironic commentary on Franciscus's earnest dialogue with Augustinus.

In Emilia's story, Solomon counsels two young men, Joseph and Melissus. Melissus, who is seeking to be loved, is told to love.⁶⁷ Joseph asks for wisdom on how to conduct himself with his disobedient wife, and receives the answer to go to a certain bridge, where he observes a mule driver angrily whipping a reluctant mule to goad it over. He returns home and beats his sullen wife, who thereupon behaves meekly and tractably. Dioneo's tale recounts the actions undertaken by Gualtieri, Marquis of Sanluzzo, to test his wife's obedience and patience. After having informed her that he has executed their children and having cast her out for a younger woman, he then restores her to favor and family.

We have seen Emilia to be the most perplexing and intriguing of the *Decameron* narrators, and the attentive reader is struck all the more by her uncharacteristic peroration upon women's duties that precede her story. She tells the *brigata* that law, custom and Nature teach women that they are submissive to men and that it is proper for them to be ruled and governed according to men's discretion. "Nature," she adds, "has given us bodies delicate and soft, characters timid and fearful, minds benign and sensitive to suffering." A woman should therefore be "humble, patient and obedient" and she who transgresses these bounds deserves "not only severe censure but bitter punishment."⁶⁸

"All women are weak and impressionable," she states.⁶⁹ We return to Filomena's words in the Introduction and the scholar Rinieri's critique in Pampinea's tale of VIII.7: indeed, he uses the same word for punishment [*gastigamento*] to justify his treatment of Elena.⁷⁰ But how should one interpret Emilia's preface, in light of her unpredictable personality? Emilia claims that she is elaborating upon the story told earlier in the day by Pampinea in IX.7, in which a stub-

⁶⁷ This counsel is based on Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* 9.6, who cites as his source the Stoic Hecato of Rhodes. Petrarch cites this counsel in *De remediis*, 1:256 (dialogue 1.50).

⁶⁸ IX.9.3–5: women "agli uomini sottomessa e secondo la discrezione de quegli convenirsi reggere e governare. . . . 'umile paziente e ubidiente . . . [Nature] ci ha fatte ne' corpi dilicate e morbide, negli animi timide e paurose, nelle menti benigne e pietose. . . . degnissima sia non solamente di ripresion grave ma d'aspro gastigamento."

⁶⁹ IX.9.9: "Son naturalmente le femine tutte labili e inchinevoli."

⁷⁰ VIII.7.87: ". . . questo che io ti fo non si possa assai propriamente vendetta chiamare ma più tosto gastigamento, in quanto la vendetta dee trapassar l'offensa, e questo non v'agiungerà. . . ."

born and suspicious wife is mauled by a wolf after ignoring her husband's warning. But Emilia's relation to Pampinea is contentious, as we have seen in Day I. Could it be that Boccaccio has nodded, or that Emilia's character has changed with her title? True to her office as Queen, she may assume, like Pampinea, the role of providing instruction [*ammaestramento*] and thus preface her tale with "preaching" [*il predicare*].⁷¹

The reader may entertain this interpretation.⁷² But her words leave a hint at another, subversive reading, that not only sustains her episodic rivalry with Pampinea but also, true to her character, complicates any straightforward interpretation of her tale. This sense of ambiguity is registered in the *brigata*'s reaction afterwards: the ladies are troubled and the young men laugh.⁷³

Emilia claims she has previously expressed her view on women's duties on more than one occasion [IX.9.6]. She therefore leads the reader to consider her statement in context of her story-telling throughout the exile, and implies a continuity of character that, paradoxically, is fractured by her moral preface. For she is not given to moralizing, as we have seen in her ballad closing Day I and her story of Cesca and the mirror in Day VI.⁷⁴ Only her story in day VIII, of Monna Piccarda's trick played upon the Provost of Fiesole, conveys sentiments similar to those in the preface. In this tale, the widow Piccarda pretends that she will sleep with the Provost in the face of his importunate and irrepressible demands. To her supposed willingness he replies, "If women were made of silver, you could not turn them into coins, for they bend too easily."⁷⁵ Yet it is clear, in this story, that the Provost is deluded. He only imagines Piccarda to be weak, and she takes advantage of his prejudice to expose his lust before

⁷¹ IX.9.3: law, custom, and Nature "ammaestrassono" women as to their proper role; at the end of her preface she says: "Ma lasciando stare il predicare . . ." [IX.9.9].

⁷² See Cazalé Bérard, "Filoginia/misoginia" in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 125–126.

⁷³ IX.10.2: "Questa novella dalla reina detta diede un poco da mormorare alle donne e da ridere a' giovani."

⁷⁴ While it is true that she claims women to be more easily frightened than men in VII.1, the story of werewolf, she intends this statement ironically, since the "werewolf" is question is actually the lady's ill-timed lover and her fright is a ruse to fool her husband.

⁷⁵ VIII.4.13: "Se le femine fossero d'ariento, elle non varrebbon denaio, per ciò che niuna se ne terrebbe a martello." I follow here McWilliam's translation, *Decameron*, 572.

the bishop. Emilia's reference to the Provost's viewpoint therefore cautions the reader to qualify her conventional wisdom about women, especially in context of her rivalry with Pampinea. Piccarda's successful trick in duping authority is in fact obliquely criticized later by Pampinea through the reversals of the widow Elena at the hands of the scholar. Why should Emilia therefore seek to corroborate, as she asserts, the moral of Pampinea's tale of the suspicious wife and her punishment in IX.7?

In referring to Solomon's counsel, Emilia's tale in fact plays upon the proper understanding of authority, a concern we have witnessed in the *Decameron*, from Abraam's visit to Rome to Rinieri's scholarship; it forms a central focus of Petrarch's humanism as well. When Joseph returns home, he declares to Melissus that his violent scourging of his wife will be "a game" [*un giuoco*]: "we shall soon see the worth of Solomon's advice."⁷⁶ Joseph seeks to test, through his own experience, what he sees on the bridge, which he takes as the enactment of Solomon's counsel. It is the mule driver's actions there that leads him to attempt this imitation: "clearly," Joseph tells Melissus at the bridge, "I know that I have not known the right way to beat my wife."⁷⁷ But has Joseph understood Solomon's advice? In contrast to the mendicant preachers, Solomon speaks enigmatically, stating simply "Love" to Melissus and "Go to Goosebridge" to Joseph. These responses require the seeker to discover their meaning, which is not elaborated, made manifest or transparent. Once again the reader is moved to treat Emilia's apparent clarity of moral purpose more cautiously.

When Joseph and Melissus first encounter the mule driver, they scold him for savagely whipping his animal, and ask, "Why don't you use your wits to lead him gently and nicely?"⁷⁸ Their first reaction is to use persuasion rather than violence. The mule driver responds, "You know your horses, I know my mule." This interchange sheds light on Joseph's relation to his wife, for Joseph tells Melissus, when they first meet, that he also failed to mollify his wife

⁷⁶ IX.9.26: "...tosto vedremo chente sia stato il consiglio di Salamone..."; confirmed IX.9.31.

⁷⁷ IX.9.22: "...il consiglio datomi da Salamone potrebbe esser buono e vero, per ciò che assai manifestamente conosco che io non sapeva battere la donna mia: ma questo mulattiere m'ha mostrato quella che io abbia a fare."

⁷⁸ IX.9.19: "perché non t'ingegni tu di menarlo bene e pianemente?"

“neither through entreaties nor little gifts nor anything else.”⁷⁹ The basic disharmony in Joseph’s marriage, then, stems from his misapprehension of the feminine as an animal to be domesticated. His experience on the bridge however does not lead him to realize this insight into his fundamental problem. Instead he draws a conclusion that ratifies his conventional view of the feminine. He goes home and beats his wife “with increasing rage,”⁸⁰ similar to Rinieri’s fury against Elena. By copying the cruelty of the mule driver, he moves, like the scholar, farther away from the *umanità* at the center of the *Decameron*. He regards feminine nature as an object apart from himself, as an element to be controlled and mastered.⁸¹

The limits of Joseph’s interpretation are highlighted, at the story’s end, by the experience of Melissus. Unlike Joseph, Melissus seeks from Solomon not the briefest path to domestic tranquillity, but rather love itself, and he is counseled to love. And Melissus is fortunate to have back home a personal interpreter, a “wise man,” who verifies Solomon’s advice and remarks on Melissus’s pride and vanity, of which he has been unaware.⁸² Both young men, therefore, are in the dark about their own lives, but Melissus, striving for the higher good, becomes enlightened with further counsel. Joseph does not escape from his prejudices, and, by further isolating himself from his wife and the feminine quality of compassion, he only deepens his self-deception. Emilia, emphasizing women’s submissiveness in her introduction, establishes a frame for enacting these prejudices. Joseph’s actions win no acclaim from the women among the *brigata*, which, one suspects, was Emilia’s intention at the outset. Her prefatory remarks are therefore a parody of Pampinea’s posturing, and she includes in her story the ironic reversal of her own purported moral.

Rinieri, in his scholarly spite, shows contempt for the feminine; Joseph strives to master and domesticate it. Both courses of action

⁷⁹ IX.9.20: “Voi conoscete i vostri cavalli, e io conosco il mio mulo. . .”; IX.9.12: “. . . la quale [sua moglie] egli né con prieghi né con lusinghe né in alcuna altra guisa dalle sue ritrosie ritrar poteva. . .”

⁸⁰ IX.9.30: “con piú furia l’una volta che l’altra.”

⁸¹ This conclusion is ratified by the traditional association of “donkey” with the body, expressed most famously by St. Francis, but also by Petrarch in his *De otio religioso*, 73.28–74.20. Women were conventionally categorized in the somatic realm, one ruled by the ‘masculine’ *anima*: see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 261–263.

⁸² IX.9.34: “un savio uomo.”

find support in the clerical vision of the feminine as treacherous and weak. In Dioneo's story, the last of the *Decameron*, Gualtieri also needs to assert his authority over his wife, not out of anger or quest for peace, but out of anxiety over feminine constancy. Like his predecessors Bernabò, Rinieri, and Joseph, Gualtieri struggles to appreciate a woman's condition. Yet the *Decameron's* final tale more fully addresses the quality of the feminine that primarily concerned the mendicants and the humanists alike: the attribute of worldly instability, of temporal change and flux. Once again there is an apparent reversal of roles, for while Griselda outwardly shows herself impassive to the blows dealt by her husband, Gualtieri is susceptible to mistrusting both her and his judgment, and increases the terror of his testing.

Petrarch regarded this story as the most worthy of Boccaccio's hundred, translating—and revising—it in Latin. We have noted the difficulty of reading any story of the *Decameron* in isolation, and no less a critic than Petrarch, when moved by moral purpose, is liable to misprise the range of interpretative meanings it conveys. Petrarch sees Griselda as a model for the soul of Christian fortitude amid tribulation.⁸³ In fact her firmness of mind in the face of Gualtieri's repeated emotional torture is remarkable: he strips her naked in public on the day of their betrothal; he pretends to have each of their children executed in turn, on the grounds that she shames him by her lowly birth; he casts her off, claiming to desire a younger woman. Each of these blows is borne, Dioneo notes, by an extraordinary self-control, and it is certainly tempting to see her as a Stoic sage, a mistress over her painful distress.⁸⁴

Yet within the continuum of the *Decameron's* vision of feminine nature, another aspect reveals itself, one that hearkens also to mendicant theory and portrayals. In the *Miracoli's* narrative of the girl without hands, the worldly Queen exercises cruelty and treachery,

⁸³ *Seniles* XVII.3.58: "Hanc historiam stile nunc alio retexere visum fuit, non tam ideo ut matronas nostri temporis ad imitandum huius uxoris patientiam, que michi vix imitabilis videtur, quam ut legentes ad imitandum saltem femine constantiam excitarem, ut quod hec viro suo prestitit, hoc prestare Deo nostro audeant. . . .", in Giovanni Boccaccio / Francesco Petrarca, *Griselda*, ed. Luca Carlo Rossi (Palermo: Salerio, 1991), 61–63.

⁸⁴ *Seniles* XVII.3.59, in *Griselda*, 63: "Abunde ego constantibus viris ascripserim, quisquis is fuerit, qui pro Deo suo sine murmure patiat quod pro suo mortali coniuge rusticana hec muliercula passa est."

the Virgin mercy and compassion. The irony of Dioneo's portrait of Gualtieri is that while he anxiously machinates to "test her patience,"⁸⁵ wary of her disobedience, he betrays the feminine characteristics he fears in her: duplicity, inconstancy, and disloyalty. He incorporates the cruel nature of the worldly Queen. This tale therefore finally revises the mendicant notion of woman's nature by showing, with psychological insight, that the more one projects one's fears onto women, the more one partakes in those feminine attributes that one earnestly wishes to externalize and separate from oneself. Gualtieri, following upon Bernabò, Rinieri, and Joseph, is diminished by a lack of compassion, of suffering with the distressed. He falls prey to "a novel thought" to test her, and exhibits, in Dioneo's words, "a crazy bestiality" and irrationality.⁸⁶

Only in the end is he moved, like the Virgin, to show compassion for her sufferings and end her trial, restoring her as his wife.⁸⁷ The renewed nuptials of this and other *Decameron* stories, such as that of Bernabò and Zinevra, symbolize the theme of reclaiming and re-integrating the feminine characteristics of the soul—of emotion, movement, and susceptibility—into one's ethical awareness. Zinevra and Griselda exemplify different types of this integration. Zinevra is cited by her husband for her feminine as well as masculine accomplishments, and resourcefully arranges her own return.⁸⁸ Griselda, in Dioneo's fine antithetical syntax, distinguishes herself both for her actions and for her disposition:

Briefly put, within in a short period of time, not only in the march but throughout the land, she knew how to conduct herself in such a way that people began to speak of both her valour and her fine comportment, and to contradict themselves should they have said anything against her husband when he married her.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ X.10.27: "provare la pazienza di lei."

⁸⁶ *Loc. cit.*: "un nuovo pensiero"; X.10.3: "una matta bestialità."

⁸⁷ X.10.58, 64: This compassion is revealed implicitly in the context of the narrative, in accord with Boccaccio's continuous appeal to the psychological stratum. Gualtieri witnesses her continual suffering and possible bitterness over his actions, and weeps with her after restoring her to her position as wife and marchioness.

⁸⁸ II.9.8–10. See Barolini's comments on this tale in "Le parole son femmine," 180–182.

⁸⁹ X.10.26: "E in breve non solamente nel suo marchesato ma per tutto, anzi che gran tempo fosse passato, seppe ella sí fare, che ella fece ragionare del suo valore e del suo bene adoperare, e in contrario rivolgere, se alcuna cosa detta s'era contro al marito per lei quando sposate l'avea."

Griselda, despite her apparent impassivity, does not therefore fall neatly into a Stoic model. Along with being “gracious and kind”, she is an exemplar of womanly obedience and subservience.⁹⁰ At every test she confirms her submission to his wishes. This patience contrasts markedly with Joseph’s shrewish wife and highlights all the more Gualtieri’s cruelty, which is a sign of his divided self. Yet she grieves inwardly, quietly.⁹¹ Her self-composure is a *persona*, a bearing, that receives its gravity through her desire to obey. For she, like her husband, sees her emotional life centered on their marriage, and on the nature of her love for him.

The focus on emotion and movement accords with the work’s sense of the mutability and mortality of all earthly things, announced by the spectre of the Plague.⁹² We may repeat that this reclamation of emotion and movement as dominant components of the self and the world does not ‘secularize’ the mendicant message, which one might assume from the lay characters and the absence of divine intervention of the sort that appears in the Marian legends and mendicant *exempla*. The division between the spiritual and the secular is not at play here, for like Petrarch, Boccaccio is exposing the flaws in the philosophical and psychological foundations of the mendicant vision: he critiques their moral metaphysics, turning to a different conception of humanity and the world that is not rooted in a static ontology and objective epistemology. For Boccaccio, emotions move and change, but also inspire.⁹³

In contrast to the mendicant anxiety over feminine instability, and over emotional provocation, Boccaccio sees the need for the self to confront this power of passion and temporal vicissitude. The self gathers its strength on the sea of time, by remaining open to the shifts of emotion and fortune. The Plague and other cultural disturbances have broken the traditional patterns of moral meaning, and in the wreckage lie the mendicant attempts to bind time and emotion, qualities of the feminine, into ordered, subjugated spheres.

⁹⁰ X.10.24–25: “. . . era tanto obediante al marito e tanto servente. . . . E similmente verso i subditi del marito era tanto graziosa e tanto benigna. . . .”

⁹¹ E.g. X.10.31: “come che gran noia nel cuore sentisse”; 41: “forte in se medesima si dolea.”

⁹² This idea is repeated in the introduction to day IX, IX.intro.2–5.

⁹³ Cazalé Bérard, “Filoginia/misoginia,” 137, claims that the story criticizes the split in the traditional, if unreal, vision of women between the ideals of Mary and Eve.

Boccaccio and his readers hearken to a 'life-clock' that traces life's passion and death's presence; it is force of passion, not reason, that makes his characters feel alive, both in their own actions and in their earthly destinies. Sexual desire, deception, greed, and empathy motivate their behavior more than pious restraint or commitment to social mores.⁹⁴ Hence Boccaccio's story of Nastagio degli Onesti (V.8) revises the moral *exemplum* cited in the *Mirror of True Penitence*. In both tales a woman's spirit suffers regular punishment for her transgression committed while she was alive. But for Passavanti the transgression is the sin of lust; for Boccaccio it is for her "fierceness and cruelty" in rejecting her suitor's love, for possessing a heart "hard and cold, ever resistant to love and pity."⁹⁵ Like the scholar Rinieri, she has turned away from the twin feelings of love and compassion, feelings that for Boccaccio characterize his relation to women and the feminine in the *Decameron*.

Boccaccio's relation to the feminine emerges most directly in his words of introduction and conclusion. He begins the work in the Proem, we have seen, expressing compassion for women in seclusion. In the introduction to the stories of the fourth day, the narrator defends his work by listing six criticisms leveled against it. His critics have claimed that 1) he takes too much delight in entertaining women, and that 2) "it is not honorable" to please or console women, or sing their praises.⁹⁶ Furthermore 3) Boccaccio is the wrong age, presumably too old, to pursue this entertainment for women. Again, it is said that 4) as a poet, he should reside among the Muses, and not mix with women through these fooleries. Indeed 5) rather than occupying himself with these trifles, he should be worrying more about his next meal. Finally his critics charge that 6) the stories he relates are not consistent with the facts.

⁹⁴ By my count, more stories center on *libido* than love—34 vs. 25—and of course many of the love stories are about extramarital pursuits.

⁹⁵ V.8.21, 23: "per la sua fierezza e crudeltà ando sì la mia sciagura. . . . quel cuor duro e freddo, nel qual mai né amor né pietà poterano entrare. . . ." See Passavanti's *exemplum* in *Racconti esemplari* 2:549–553; *Specchio*, 46–49 (III.2). See also Battaglia Ricci's remarks in her *Boccaccio* (181–183) about the multiple sources for this story, including Andreas Capellanus and Dante, and the more extensive analysis of its sources and themes in Giovanni Sinocropi, "Chastity and Love in the *Decameron*," in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Robert Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 104–120.

⁹⁶ IV.intro.5: "onesta cosa non è."

Scanning these objections we may notice that the first two concern the morality of human behavior in general, while the last four address more specifically the proper actions of the artist. Boccaccio fittingly does not respond to these objections by means of a conceptual refutation, but first with a story, one that comments on the relative strengths of human nature and convention, and on the power of erotic desire. He engages both sets of objections in a way true to the *Decameron*: in the guise of artistic parody of the moral *exemplum*. A list of counter-arguments follows upon the story, but the story is the fulcrum of his defense.

The story is the famous tale of Filippo Balducci and his son. It is, we witnessed in Chapter Three, a parody of a tale from the lives of the desert fathers. Balducci, after his wife's early death, retires to a hermitage outside Florence and raises his son according to the strictest asceticism and ecclesiastical liturgies. Some fifteen years later, the child, now a young man, accompanies his father into the city for supplies. Balducci imagines that his upbringing will protect his son from "worldly things," but no sooner does the son see a group of beautiful young women than he is seized with passion. The father names them "little geese" [*papere*] in an effort to temper his son's yearning, but to no avail: at the end Balducci "unhappily felt that nature possessed greater force than his efforts [*ingegno*]."⁹⁷

While this story has been examined for its parody and naturalist polemic,⁹⁸ in context of Boccaccio's defense it counters the moralists' first two objections, against Boccaccio's desire to please women. For it is only natural that he should please them, like Balducci's son. With acute antithetical phrasing, he says he is little concerned when his attacker "neither feels nor knows either the pleasures or the virtue of natural affection."⁹⁹ Boccaccio then directly rejects the clerical, celibate revulsion from erotic passion and love for women.

The responses to the next objections speak more to Boccaccio's self-understanding as a poet. As concerns the third criticism, Boccaccio's

⁹⁷ IV.intro.18–29: "le cose del mondo"; "sentí incontanente piú aver di forza la natura del il suo ingegno."

⁹⁸ Aldo D. Scaglione, *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 101–105. For a discussion of the tale's sources and its realism see Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio* (185–187) and Giancarlo Mazzacurati in *Lessico critico decameriano*, 293–299.

⁹⁹ IV.intro.32: "... sí come persona che i piaceri né la virtù naturale affezione né sente né conosce, cosí mi ripiglia: e io poco me ne curo."

age, he notes that his illustrious poetic predecessors, Dante included, sang the praises of women in their later years.¹⁰⁰ That Boccaccio would place himself in the company of Dante and Cavalcante and Cino shows that he considers his work more than a trifle. If his critics say he fails to dwell with the Muses on Parnassus (objection 4), Muses, he notes, do not live with men. But women do. And women, resembling the lady Muses at first sight [*nel primo aspetto*], inspire him to compose his writings more than the Muses ever have. To be sure the Muses taught him how to write his lines—so perhaps they are not so distant after all, “in honor of the similitude that ladies have to them.” Boccaccio therefore reverses the criticism against his accusers, proclaiming earthly *eros* a more than adequate source of artistic inspiration.¹⁰¹ Here Boccaccio finds a colleague in Petrarch, if once again parting ways from the ecclesiastical writers, whose only Muse may be Mary.¹⁰²

Boccaccio concludes his apology with a final declaration of his devotion to women.¹⁰³ Referring to the story of Balducci, he says he has always tried to please women “with all [his] power,” and will now redouble his efforts: “. . . others and I who love you do so according to nature; and to want to contest these laws, namely of nature, they [my critics] need powers too grand, and very often these powers are employed not merely in vain, but with the greatest damage to the person making the effort.”¹⁰⁴ In the narrator’s own voice

¹⁰⁰ IV.intro.33. See also Pampinea’s story of I.10, discussed above, chapter 3.

¹⁰¹ IV.intro.35–36: “. . . le Muse son donne, e benché le donne quel che le Muse vagliono non vagliono, pure esse hanno nel primo aspetto simiglianza di quelle, sí che, quando per altro non mi piacessero, per quello mi dovrebbero piacere; senze che le donne già mi fur cagione di comporre mille versi, dove le Muse mai non mi furono di farne alcun cagione. Aiutoronmi elle bene e mostraronmi comporre que’ mille; e forse a queste cose scrivere, quantunque sieno umilissime, si sono elle venute parecchie volte a starsi meco, in servizio forse e in onore della simiglianza che le donne hanno a esse. . . .”

¹⁰² See the *Miracoli* story of the priest, whose lips and tongue are healed by the Virgin Mary. The Virgin tells him that “. . . non posso sostenere el tormento . . . di quella lingua e di quelle labbra che tante volte manno salutata dicendo lave maria e tanto spesso anno cantate lemie senquentie e hynni con tanto dilecto a mia reverentia e honore.” *Miracoli*, cap. 73.2. The story makes it clear that he praised Mary in this way “essendo molto licterato et scientato.”

¹⁰³ I have omitted his responses to the fifth and sixth objections, since they concern first the practical nature of the poetic calling and the accuracy of the stories, matters not immediately related to our discussion of the feminine.

¹⁰⁴ IV.intro.41: “E se mai con tutta la mia forza a dovervi in cosa alcuna compiacere mi disposi, ora piú che mai mi vi disporrò, per ciò che io conosco che

Boccaccio expresses the psychological harm inflicted by Rinieri, Joseph, and Gualtieri. The accusers who moralize about his love for women in actuality follow their “corrupt appetites” in “this brief life.”¹⁰⁵ Boccaccio turns the mendicant language of desire against the moralists themselves, reminding them that sensing life’s brevity may ignite either natural or ignoble passions.

Boccaccio’s appeal to eros and instinct is not merely episodic or a program of polemic, but employs the subtle weave of irony running throughout the work. He directs this irony against both clerical disquisition and the pretence of scholars. We witness this irony of clerical scholasticism not only in what his introduction expresses, but also in the way these sentiments are expressed.

The outline of his apology in day four consists of a list of six criticisms, the story of Filippo Balducci and his son, and then the replies to these criticisms. Boccaccio echoes the method of the *quaestio disputata*, used by the schoolmen, most notably the Dominican Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was canonized in 1323 and is a major authority in Rainerio’s *Pantheologia* and Bartolomeo’s *Summa pisanella*. The *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas answers its questions of inquiry first with an initial statement (the *videtur*, “it seems that . . .”) supported by various arguments, only to refute this claim by posing the author’s thesis (the *sed contra*: “on the contrary”), in which typically an authority is cited, and then by responding to the arguments one by one.

By treating his critics in a scholastic form of argumentation, Boccaccio subjects both his critics and their style of expression to parody. According to this form, his question of inquiry is: whether he should have undertaken such a work as the *Decameron*? The *videtur* is that ‘it seems that he should not have,’ founded upon six objections against this undertaking. These objections base their attack on the impropriety of writing for women and pleasing them; they accuse Boccaccio of violating the morals of decent society and literature. It is clear therefore from this form of rhetoric that Boccaccio addresses

altra cosa dir non potrà alcuno con ragione, se non che gli altri e io, ch v’ami-amo, naturalmente operiamo; alle cui legi, cioè della natura, voler contrastare troppo gran forze bisognano, e spesse volte non solamente invano ma con grandissimo danno del faticante s’adoperano.”

¹⁰⁵ IV.intro.42: “appetite corrotti”; “questa brevia vita.”

an audience very different from his “gentle ladies,” even as his praise of their charms distinguishes his approach from that of the mendicants.

Boccaccio parodies the scholastic method most dramatically in the *sed contra*. Instead of citing, in Thomistic fashion, Scriptural or philosophic authority or principles of logic, he tells his story of Balducci, a story that proclaims the primacy of instinct and emotion over custom and reason. We witnessed earlier how his story itself revises monastic *exempla*: but it also undercuts ecclesiastical tradition by its place in his argument. Similar to his use of *exemplum*, Boccaccio employs the manner of scholastic discourse in order to expose its failings. He turns the critics’ argumentation against them, expressing, in both form and content, that a major flaw in the mendicant approach to morality is its excessive reliance on the *ratio* and authority, and hence its distance from the experience of sensual and sensible existence. The story underscores, as noted by Cazalé Bérard, the appraisal of language modulated to the vacillations of mood, desire, and temporal change.¹⁰⁶

In the Conclusion to his work, Boccaccio shifts his ground of apology. This final section is more a defense of the literary arts than a defense of love. Boccaccio seeks to uphold the value of his writing more than the centrality of eros as a natural, instinctual inspiration, although both, we have seen, are related to one another. He directly names his critics—prudish women, clerics, and philosophers—and addresses their concerns over his use of language.

The author insists he writes his work for women, not solely for their delight but more importantly for their solace [*consolazione*, Concl.1]. As for using “excessive license” [*troppa licenzia*] unsuitable to virtue, among other arguments he advances the nature of his audience: young but mature men and women, who choose to converse in gardens, “a place of pleasure,” rather than in churches or “schools of philosophers,” where a premium is placed upon decorum.¹⁰⁷ Boccaccio

¹⁰⁶ Cazalé Bérard, “Filoginia/misoginia” in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ Concl.7: “Appresso assai ben si può cognoscere queste cose non nella chiesa, delle cui cose e con animi e con vocaboli onestissimi si convien dire . . . né ancora nelle scuole de’ filosofanti dove l’onestà non meno che in altra parte è richiesta, dette sono; né tra cherici né tra filosofi in alcun luogo mai ne’ giardini, in luogo di sollazzo, tra persone giovani benché mature e non pieghevoli per novelle. . . .”

therefore designs his work for those less preoccupied with maintaining social or moral proprieties, unlike the clergy and the scholars.

Yet even in this reference he notes the disharmony between the aims of clerical instruction and its method by stating about the clergy that “one can find in their chronicles [*istorie*] more disconcerting events than in my writings.”¹⁰⁸ We have seen these discrepancies in the *exempla* recorded by Passavanti, despite his own criticisms of his fellow preachers.¹⁰⁹ If the *Decameron* stories contain too many quips and jests, they at least are appropriately aimed at chasing women’s melancholy, and one sees similar jokes in the “sermons made by friars to rebuke people for their guilty actions.”¹¹⁰ Boccaccio imagines his pastoral calling as alleviating emotional distress among his women readers. His ends and means are consistent, while friars are “good fellows” who “flee discomfort for the love of God.”¹¹¹ Like Juvenal or Tedaldo, the spurned lover who adopts friar’s garb in Emilia’s story of the third day (III.7), Boccaccio reveals an ethical sensibility behind his satire, opposed to hypocritical clerical morality, which would deprive lay people of their need for sensible entertainment. The clergy’s failure to understand the needs of the laity, especially women, is shared by the scholarly elite as well, when they complain that his stories are too long. These scholars do not appreciate the situation of secluded women, “and for those who read to pass the time, nothing can be long if it does what it endeavors to do.”¹¹²

Therefore Boccaccio reminds his critics to restrain their moral judgments before they account for the situation of the reader, lest their moral categories lack compassion for the readers and their

¹⁰⁸ *Loc. cit.* “. . . quantunque nelle sue istorie d'altramenti fatte che le scritte da me si truovino assai.”

¹⁰⁹ *Specchio de vera penitenza*, 284: “Questi così fatti predicatori, anzi giullari e ramanzieri e buffoni, a’ quali concorrono gli uditori come a coloro che cantano de’ Paladini, che fanno i grandi colpi pure con l’archetto della viuola, sono infedeli e isleali dispensatori del tesoro del Signore loro. . .”; cited by Mulchahey, “*First the Bow is Bent in Study*”, 417–418.

¹¹⁰ Concl.23: “. . . considerato che le prediche fatte da’ frati per rimorder delle lor colpe gli uomini, il più oggi piene di motti e di ciance e di scede, estimai che quegli medesimi non stesser male nelle mie novelle, scritte per cacciar la malinconia delle femine.”

¹¹¹ Concl.26: “per ciò che i frati son buone persone e fuggino il disagio per l’amor di Dio.”

¹¹² Concl.20: “non m’è per cio uscito di mente me avere questo mio affanno offerto all’oziose e non all’altre: e a chi per tempo passar legge, niuna cose puote esser lunga, se ella quel fa per che egli l’adopera.”

author. It is the reader, in particular the female reader, not the tales themselves, who ultimately determines the value of his storytelling: "Each thing is in itself good in a certain way, and when badly used can be harmful in many ways; and this I claim for my stories. . . . Who would derive use and benefit from them, they will not deny these to her, nor will they ever be said or held to be anything but useful and decorous [*utile e oneste*] if they are read at the right time or by those people for whom they are told."¹¹³

Boccaccio's antithetical style achieves the temporal and social differentiation missing among his critics' form of address. By ostensibly writing to women, who according to their sex are more nearly associated with change and matters of the heart, he can support his humanist view of the human condition. This view considers human understanding, moral or otherwise, to be qualified by the flow of time and circumstance and emotional receptivity. One must be cautious therefore about absolute epistemological assertions, even about one's own work, as Boccaccio implies by shifting the ground of his defense, and by closing his book with the playful but telling remark about his "tongue" or language:

I confess nevertheless that things of this world have no stability but are always in flux, and that this could have happened to my tongue [*lingua*]. Not long ago—not trusting my own judgment, which I strive to avoid when it concerns myself—one of my lady neighbors said I had the best and sweetest tongue in the world. . . .¹¹⁴

Along with erotic innuendo, Boccaccio suggests that usefulness or delight of the language resides in the listener. That the innuendo is no accident is clear from Boccaccio's entire relation to the feminine with his sense of its spontaneity, passion, and variability. The mendicants by contrast do not recognize the subjective, temporal situation of their audience, and of their own language. They have not

¹¹³ Concl.13–14: "Ciascuna cosa in se medesima è buona a alcuna cosa, e male adoperata può essere nociva di molte; e così dico delle mie novelle. . . . chi utilità e frutto ne vorrà, elle nol negheranno, né sarà mai che altro che utile e oneste sien dette o tenute, se a que' tempi o a quelle persone si leggeranno per cui e pe' quali state son raccontate."

¹¹⁴ Concl.27: "Confesso nondimeno le cose di questo mondo non avere stabilità alcuna ma sempre essere in mutamento, e così potrebbe della mia lingua essere intervenuto; la quale, non credendo io al mio giudizio, il quale a mio potere io fuggo nelle mie cose, non ha guari mi disse una mia vicina che io l'aveva la migliore e la più dolce del mondo. . . ."

appreciated the feminine circumstances of their discourse in a way experienced by the humanists Boccaccio and Petrarch. Boccaccio would come closer to the ecclesiastical morality in later life, but he would remain aware of the *Decameron's* philosophical accomplishment.

Unlike Boccaccio's more extroverted work, Petrarch takes his reader inward, to his own various thoughts and emotions. We have witnessed his weighing of authority, and how his preoccupation with time's flow shaped his thinking on learning from his past and present. The fragmentary nature of his expression, in letters and poems, and in the separate personae of the *Secretum*, force him and his reader to cultivate a sensitivity for the concentricity of his life's journey, in which a given moment possesses an individual validity but simultaneously reflects or refracts the larger whole. Reading his work in the light of its spontaneity and reflection, one recognizes the movement and architecture of the *Decameron* as well, where a single story or episode carries an immediate as well as a larger valence within the entire work.

When examining the *Secretum* or the *Canzoniere* for their commentary on eros and the feminine, we must use this sense of concentricity to understand the dialectical artistry of his expression. Like the *Decameron*, these works employ poetry with a philosophical purpose. The *Secretum* records the dialogue between Franciscus and Augustinus, and in turn between the absolute and the conditional or transitory, for claims are tested and revised in the course of their conversation. We have seen how the *Secretum* paradoxically imposes upon the reader the responsibility to evaluate its judgments, analogous to Boccaccio's practice in the *Decameron*. The reader's memory and experiential sensibility are also summoned in the sequence of poems in the *Canzoniere*. Here Petrarch's voice reaches out to many interlocutors—Laura, the reader, Love, Mary—and, turning inward with ever greater intensity, to himself. The dialectic is raised finally to the gambit between time's passing and eternal rest, between the realm of the senses and that of the spirit. What emerges more clearly at the end of the poem cycle is how Laura comes to symbolize both realms for Petrarch, and how his love for Laura itself embraces broad but contrasting emotions that leave him inspired and debilitated.

From our study of these works we may observe how Petrarch departs from the mendicant view of the feminine and erotic passion, not least by incorporating this view as only one voice in a larger

dialectic. This dialectic, in his mind, more fully engages the dimensions of the human experience.

We have noted the debate over love's sway in *Canzoniere* 360, in which the poet accuses Love of distracting him from spiritual meditation. Since Augustinus also launches this accusation in the last day of the *Secretum*, scholars such as Tateo have argued that Augustinus is the voice of Petrarch, in his "new" or reformed self, who condemns the defense of love by Franciscus, his "old" self.¹¹⁵ We must be cautious however in drawing these associations, because in fact the argument between Augustinus and Franciscus reveals the problems in the Church's condemnation of erotic love.¹¹⁶ These problems come to light when one first traces the flow and oscillation in the debate, and then records their concentric resonances within the *Secretum* itself and the *Canzoniere*.

Franciscus tells Augustinus that one's love must be distinguished with regard to its object: "If I burn for an infamous and shameful woman, my yearning is most insane; if however a certain rare model of virtue draws me and I seek deeply to love and honor it, is not this different?"¹¹⁷ Franciscus claims this distinction between loves is among his "opinions" that might differ from the perspective of Augustinus, but it is one that he values because he has held it for a long time.¹¹⁸

Augustinus accuses Franciscus of choosing to reside in error, in avoidance of the actual state of his love: ". . . you will cast your mind into complete insanity, where shame and fear perish and that which should bridle your passion: all reason and knowledge of the truth."¹¹⁹ This response conveys the clerical understanding of reining in emotion by reason, language used primarily by the Tuscan mendicants

¹¹⁵ Tateo, *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica*, 31–38, discussed above, chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ As we noted earlier, the poem is also inconclusive, with the "Queen" withholding her judgment.

¹¹⁷ *Secretum* 3.2.5: "Si infamem turpemque mulierem ardeo, insanissimus ardor est; si rarum aliquod specimen virtutis allicit inque illud amandum venerandumque multus sum, quid putas?" Franciscus differentiates between "woman" [*mulierem*] and "model" [*specimen*], which might imply a distancing from the feminine itself, like the mendicant point of view. Yet this may be a rhetorical strategy that accommodates Augustinus's view of woman, a view that he reveals in the course of the conversation (3.13).

¹¹⁸ 3.2.6: ". . . opinionibus antiquis inheremus pertinaciter, nec facile divellimur."

¹¹⁹ 3.2.8: ". . . nempe in omnes animum precipitaturus insanias, ubi pudor et metus est, que frenare solet impetus, ratio omnis ac cognitio veritatis exciderent."

such as Rainerio but also, with ironic purpose, by the *Decameron* narrators. Like the Dominicans, Augustinus sees love as a form of insanity that Franciscus must urgently dispel. Augustinus repeats this charge of *insania* when he decries the amount of time that Franciscus has spent in loving a “mortal woman.”¹²⁰ This prompts Franciscus to respond in his first defense of his beloved Laura and of women in general:

Spare me the insults, please. Both Thais [a courtesan] and Livia [the virtuous wife of Augustus] were mortal women. Do you otherwise know anything about the woman you were discussing? One whose mind has no concern for earthly things, but yearns with heavenly desire; in whose face, if ever a thing be true, a model of divine beauty gleams; whose mores exemplify consummate decorum [*honestatis*]; whose voice and luminous gaze possess no mere mortal strength; who, when she walks, represents something more than human. I ask you to think well upon this and I believe you will find the right words to use.¹²¹

The *Secretum* apparently records the conversation between Franciscus and Augustinus in 1342–1343, six years before Laura’s death from the plague. Many scholars now believe that Petrarch wrote or at least revised the work in the early 1350’s, in which case Franciscus’s devotion to the living Laura, and Augustinus’s reminder of her mortality, possess greater poignancy.¹²² When she has died and lies pale in her tomb, Augustinus replies, “you will be ashamed to have devoted your immortal mind to a fallen little body.”¹²³ In the meantime, sixteen years of his life have been spent chasing “false pleasures.”¹²⁴

Franciscus reacts by shifting the focus on his passion for Laura, claiming he loves not her body, but her soul, whose *mores* “transcend the human,” as if it lived “among heavenly things.”¹²⁵ Augustinus

¹²⁰ 3.3.1: “De muliere mortali sermo nobis instituitur. . . .”

¹²¹ 3.3.2: “Parce convitiis, precor; mulier mortalis erat et Thais et Livia. Ceterum scis ne de ea muliere mentionem tibi exortam, cuius mens terrenarum nescia curarum celestibus desiderii ardet; in cuius aspectu, siquid usquam veri est, divini specimen decoris effulget; cuius mores consummate honestatis exemplar sunt; cuius nec vox nec oculorum vigor mortale aliquid nec incessus hominem representat? Hoc, queso, iterum atque iterum cogita: credo quibus verbis utendum sit intelliges.” Although neither Franciscus nor Augustinus names his beloved, it becomes clear from their later discussions of laurels that it is Laura who is the subject.

¹²² See the debate among Martinelli, Baron and Rico, cited above, chapter 4.

¹²³ 3.3.4: “. . . cum effigiem morte variateam et pallentia membra conspexeris, pudebit animum immortalem caduco applicuisse corpusculo. . . .”

¹²⁴ 3.3.3: “falsis blanditiis”; cf. *Canz.* 359.41: “fallaci ciance.”

¹²⁵ 3.3.11: “. . . nec me tam corpus noveris amasse quam animan, moribus humana

will have none of this: recognizing that Franciscus will not bear to hear his “little woman” criticized, since he surrounds her with “clouds of praise,” Augustinus turns to condemn not what, but how he loves. Not the woman is shameful, he says at this point, but the love of Franciscus itself.¹²⁶

This is a critical moment in the dialogue. As Franciscus moves his perspective to addressing Laura’s spiritual nature, Augustinus brings him to analyze his own inner tendencies. Less central now is the object of Franciscus’s affection, compared to the quality of his passion. What have these emotions wrought in Franciscus’s soul, his counselor asks? Augustinus takes the mendicant morality more fully into the psychological realm, evaluating not simply the presence of passion or its object, but its very nature. For Franciscus has rejected the simple charge that his desire for a woman, in and of itself, is wrong or shameful, no matter its strength or duration.

Franciscus replies to this probing inquiry by declaring that his love for her has refined him: “the most fragile seed of virtue” has been cultivated by her “most noble actions,” drawing him back from shameful actions, transforming his behavior, leading him, in the light of her reputation, to pursue his own fame, regardless of the obstacles or other pleasures that stood to seduce him from his goal. She has been “the leader of all my paths,” who roused his drugged, somnolent genius: in short, she is his moral and poetical Muse.¹²⁷ Like Boccaccio, Franciscus asserts that an earthly woman has inspired him, although he is at pains to diminish the admixture of sensuality that Boccaccio proclaims.

Nonetheless, Laura is a real woman, however noble or pure. Augustinus impresses upon Franciscus her physical charm. Her allure, he claims, rather than nourishing his potential, has in fact cost him his opportunity for greatness. “Oh what a man you could have become, if she had not held you back by the pleasures of her beauty [*forme*].”¹²⁸ Her beauty itself, Augustinus says, is not at fault, but it

transcendentibus delectatum, quorum exemplo qualiter inter celicolos vivatur, admoneor.”

¹²⁶ 3.4.1–2: “. . . mulierculam tuam quantalibet laude cumules licebit. . . . Dubitari non potest, quin pulcerrima sepe turpiter amentur.”

¹²⁷ 3.4.6–8: “. . . nisi virtutem tenuissimam sementem, qua pectore in hoc natura locaverit, nobilissimis hec affectibus coluisset. . . . que, dux viarum omnium, torpenti ingenio calcar admovet ac semisopitum animum excitavit?”

¹²⁸ 3.4.10: “O quantum in virum evadere poterat, nisi illa te forme blanditiis

appeared so sweet and pleasing to Franciscus that his passion for it laid waste his inborn talent.¹²⁹ Augustinus therefore returns Franciscus to confront the aesthetics of desire, his pursuit of Laura and the sensual pleasure of this pursuit, and their spiritual consequences. Franciscus's devotion "perverts the order" of Creator and creature, for instead of directing his love primarily to God, he has been "captured by the enticements of what God has created," first and foremost by corporeal beauty.¹³⁰

Here the reader comes upon the moral core of Augustinus's accusation, which deepens the viewpoint of Petrarch's mendicant contemporaries toward love and the feminine. Love for a woman should be ruled and defined by one's love for God, otherwise the hierarchy of Creator over creature is upset. A sign of Franciscus's disordered love is the intensity of his passion for Laura, which has eclipsed his sight of the divine and therefore of his true happiness. Laura's beauty led Franciscus astray, defend her as he might; although not the cause of his misery, it was its origin, its provocation.

Franciscus strives to uphold his image of Laura as a guide to the divine: "Please don't be hasty in your judgment: truly my love for her showed me to love God."¹³¹ Nevertheless he is forced to admit the power of her physical beauty, and that he, now citing Ovid, "loved her mind with her body."¹³² In effect Augustinus brings Franciscus closer to earth, and elicits a confession that his passion for her spirit was mixed with his desire for her earthly and therefore temporal form. Petrarch dwells upon this combination of the physical and spiritual sides of love in the *Canzoniere*. The presence of Augustinus in the Latin work, however, moves the dialogue forward, as the father-confessor pushes Franciscus to admit that his love for a woman is responsible for his unhappiness.

retraxisset!" Her "form" or beauty also alludes to poetical form and style, in Franciscus's pursuit of the laureate.

¹²⁹ 3.4.10. "Forma quidem tibi visa est tam blanda, tam dulcis, ut in te omnem ex nativis virtutem seminibus proventuram segetem ardentissimi desiderii estibus et assiduo lacrimarum imbre vastaverit."

¹³⁰ 3.5.2-3: "At pervertit ordinem. . . Quia cum creatum omne Creatoris amore diligendum sit, tu contra, creature captus illecebris, Creatorem non qua decuit amasti."

¹³¹ 3.5.1: "Noli, queso, precipitare sententiam: Deum profecto ut amarem, illius amor prestitit."

¹³² 3.5.6: "animum cum corpore amavi"; Doti (135) notes the reference to *Am.* 10.13.

Augustinus seeks to bring Franciscus into a psychological recognition of his malaise. It has proven difficult to reach this awareness from the pulpit of moral preaching, given Franciscus's resistance. Although Augustinus assumes many of the mendicant dicta concerning eros and femininity—their seductive power, and disturbance of moral order—Augustinus, and the *Secretum* in general, employ a different method of validating these teachings. Instead of insisting upon their authority in a preconceptual way, Augustinus now follows an experiential approach, asking Franciscus to think back upon his life, to the time of his youth, and recollect when he first felt the lapse of his spiritual security. Here the dialogue calls upon the sense of the concentricity of experience within the boundaries of Franciscus's memory, as he hearkens back to his earlier years, in response to the Socratic queries of Augustinus:

Scan silently to yourself—to the degree you feel your memory is whole and fresh—scan the entire time of your life, and remember when such a change in your habits took place.¹³³

Under Augustinus's prodding, Franciscus agrees with his claim that the moment of his fall from inner contentment coincided with the time “when the first sight of this woman appeared to you.”¹³⁴ It was at this point that Franciscus began following, in his words, “the easier and broader path” of love, abandoning “the difficult and narrower way” of virtue.¹³⁵ We shall see how Petrarch offers another perspective on this choice of paths in the *Canzoniere*. In the *Secretum* Franciscus upholds his beloved's virtue and “feminine constancy”: it was he who “broke the reins” [*lorifragum*] and fell “unwarily into the snare of moral deviance.”¹³⁶

Having heard Franciscus admit to this mistake, Augustinus fires off his full condemnation of erotic passion. Lovers [*amantes*] are

¹³³ 3.5.8: “Percurre tecum tacitus (quando integram tibi sentis recentem memoriam), percurre universum vite tue tempus, et ubi tanta morum varietas inaccesserit, recordare.

¹³⁴ 3.5.11: “quando illius tibi primum mulieris species visa est.”

¹³⁵ 3.5.13: “Puto quia proclivior videbatur: dextera enim et ardua et angusta est,” echoing *Fam.* IV.1, the ascent of Ventoux.

¹³⁶ 3.6.1: “. . . postremo, cum lorifragum ac precipitem videret [Laura] deserere maluit quam sequi”; 3.6.3: “contra autem illa propositū tenax et semper una permansit, quam constantiam feminam quo magis intelligo, magis admiror.” Doti notes that *lorifragum* is Petrarch's neologism formed from *lorum* and *frango* (*Secretum*, 140). It conforms to the clerical language of bridling passion.

demented [*amentes*]; they choose temporal things in contempt of God; love, “our Cicero” asserts, is the most vehement of passions; it is a “plague” of dark pleasure, tears and sighs; Franciscus has lost his autonomy of will, ceding it to love’s sway between joy and fear, even pursuing his beloved’s name in the imperial or poetical laurels, and, ultimately, striving to reach her through poetic achievement in receiving the laureate. In brief, love is a passion that intrinsically escapes the rule of reason, and causes Franciscus to forget God and himself.¹³⁷

Franciscus reacts to this broadside with these few words: “I confess I am defeated, because everything that you recall, it seems to me, you have excerpted from the central book of experience.”¹³⁸ The references to his personal history, supported by the classical appraisal of *eros*, have convinced Franciscus at this moment that his love for Laura was aberrant.¹³⁹

In tracing the course of the conversation, we witness Franciscus altering his conception of love, from the nobility of its object, Laura, to the sincerity of its purpose and to the refinements it wrought in him, and finally to the admission of his sensual enchantment, on account of looking back over his life’s journey. At the end of this

¹³⁷ 3.6.2–3.7.1: 3.6.2: “At iste vulgatus amantium, vel ut dicam verius amentium, furor est”; 3.6.5: “Nichil est quod eque oblivionem Dei contemptum ve pariat atque amor rerum temporalium”; 3.6.6: “non frustra Cicero noster dixisse videatur quod omnibus ex animi passionibus profecto nulla est amore vehementior”; 3.7.1: “Cogita nunc ex quo mentem tuam pestis illa corripuit; quam repente, totus in gemitum versus, eo miseriarum pervenisti ut funesta cum voluptate lacrimis ac suspiriis pasceres”; 3.7.3: “Illius mutata frons tibi animum mutavit; letus et mestus pro illius varietate factus es. Denique totus ab illius arbitrio perpendisti”; 3.7.5: “Denique quia cesaream sperare fas non erat, lauream poeticam, quam studiorum tuorum tibi mentem promittebat, nichilo modestius quam dominam ipsam adanaveras concupisti”; 3.7.9: “incerta hec si tu postules / ratione certa facere, nichilo plus agas / quam si des operam, ut cum ratione insanias,” citing Terence; 3.7.10: “Illa tamen est omnium precipua . . . quod Dei suique pariter oblivionem parit.” The association of *amans* with *amens* may stem from Terence, *Andria* I.3.218 and is recalled also in *Fam.* IX.4.11 and *De remediis* dialogue I.69. See the note by Dotti to *Secretum* 3.6.2, p. 140.

¹³⁸ 3.7.11: “Victus sum, fateor, quoniam cuncta, que memoras, de medio experientie libro michi videris excerptisse.”

¹³⁹ In *De otio religioso*, a work, we have noted, dedicated to the Carthusians, Petrarch critiques the passions for their inherent instability, combining classical and Christian references. The darker passions, especially *libido*, undermine reason and humanity: 68.5–12 and 71.5–9: “ubi libido imperat non modo Deum non videri . . . sed nullum penitus rationi esse locum consequenterque nec humanitati, que sine ratione nec esse potest nec intelligi. . . .” Contrast his view of *humanitas* discussed above, chapter 5, as a nature fraught by time and passion.

discourse his praise of Laura is undimmed. Augustine has succeeded in creating a larger venue for introspection, in which a single action is weighed in context of a general tendency. The *Secretum*, according to Augustine's line of reasoning, concurs with the mendicant view of eros as a spiritual snare. Augustine's diatribe, however, sounds forth after he engages Franciscus not in ratiocination, but on the contrary in experiential remembrance. While eros, in the view of the father confessor, deserves to be suppressed as a devastating emotion, in reaction to Franciscus's apology he recognizes the futility of his earlier call for "reason" to "bridle your passion."¹⁴⁰ Augustine's own zeal to lead his student to the truth has brought him to revise his approach and change his instruction.

The argument in the *Secretum* over eros and the feminine is therefore mobile and vacillating in its own right, and seeks a remedy in recollecting the emotions of personal experience. There are other problems associated with this paradox. Indicting his student's folly, Augustine verifies Franciscus's assertion that Laura has inspired him to poetic achievement. Yet the *Secretum* itself relies on the quality of poetry—voice, feeling, and mood—in order to communicate its message indirectly to the reader.

But Augustine is apparently unaware of these ironies when attempting the *coup de grace*. He counsels Franciscus to drive out his old love by finding a new one, as Ovid, the *magister amoris*, advises.¹⁴¹ This counsel accords with Boccaccio's justification for undertaking the *Decameron*, in offering various stories of love to women preoccupied with their own emotional distress. While cautioning that such a course of action has its moral dangers, Franciscus might yet discover a "hope of liberty in this transfer [of feeling], or at least a more lenient tyranny."¹⁴²

Franciscus insists however on his devotion to Laura, and Augustine then struggles to decide whether he should seek a physical change of place as a cure for his obsession. Here the argument revolves around whether movement and travel aids in the soul's recovery from eros. Augustine reaches a resolution by stating that a soul

¹⁴⁰ 3.2.8: "que frenare solet impetus, ratio omnis ac cognitio veritatis. . . ."

¹⁴¹ 3.8.2.

¹⁴² 3.8.4: "Spes enim fortisan in transitu libertatis fuerit, aut leuiaris imperii." See also *De remediis* I.69 (1:330–332).

prepared for its cure may benefit, so long as one learns from the lesson of Orpheus:

... it is not simply that you must leave behind the pestilential place, but rather that you must avoid most diligently whatever twists your mind back to past cares, lest like Orpheus returning from the nether world you lose the recovered Eurydice by looking backward... Go securely and quickly, but don't look back; forgetting past things, face what lies ahead.¹⁴³

This resolution rests uneasily. In a last revision of his counsel Augustinus returns to the power of rational reflection as the most certain means against emotional disruption: "Now know that you are summoned to this citadel [of reason], in which alone you can be safe [*tutus*] from the incursions of the passions, and through which you can be called human."¹⁴⁴ In closing his argument Augustinus upholds the hierarchy of the *ratio* over emotion as the guiding structure to a fully realized humanity, analogous to the medicant perspective that the Fall and loss of reason is *contra naturam*. Like the contemporary Dominicans, Augustinus at the end moves against the woman herself, marshaling the ecclesiastical preconceptions about feminine coldness, inconstancy and seduction:

... think how much she has harmed your soul, body and fortune; think how many things you have undertaken for her sake to no avail. Think how often you have been deceived, how often misprised, how often

¹⁴³ 3.9.13, 3.10.2: "... non tantum locus pestifer relinquendus, sed quicquid in preteritas curas animum retorquet, summa tibi diligentia fugiendum est; ne forte cum Orpheo ab inferis rediens retroque respiciens recuperatum perdas Euridicem. . . . I securus et propera, nec in tergum deflexeris; preteritorum obliviscens, in anteriora contende." Augustinus repeats this advice in 3.13.9: "... pelle omnem preteritarum memoriam curarum; omnem cogitatum, qui transacti temporis admonet, excute et, ut aiunt, ad petram parvulos tuos allide ne, si creverint, ipsi te ceno subruant." H. James Shey has noted the implicit reference in this passage to Boethius's *Consolation* III m. 12: "The Form and Meaning of the *Secretum*," in Davy Carozza and H. James Shey, ed., *Petrarch's "Secretum"* (New York: P. Lang, 1989), 9–28, in particular 16–17. But he misses how Petrarch allows for a critique of this advice, in the spirit of "dialectical imitation," to use the phrase of Thomas Greene (*Light in Troy*, 43–48). Neither Greene nor Witt (*Footsteps*, 26 n. 55) see the early humanists practicing this form of imitation in relation to classical sources.

¹⁴⁴ 3.2.11–3.13.1: "Ceterum quia, ut Ciceroni placet, valde est absonum cum in locum rationis pudor succedit, ab ipso fonte remedium, id est ab ipsa ratione, auxilium imploremus; idque intenta cogitatio prestabit, quam ex tribus animum ab amore deterrentibus ultimam collocavi. Nunc autem ad illam arcem te vocari noveris, in qua sola tutus esse potes ab incursibus passionum, et per quam homo diceris."

neglected. Think what flatteries, what laments, what tears you have cast to the winds. Think in this regard of her mien both ungrateful and supercilious, and if at times kinder, still brief and more changeable [*mobilius*] than a spring breeze! Think how much you added to her fame as she diminished your life: how you constantly cared for her name even as she neglected your condition. Think how far you separated yourself from the love of God in loving her, and what miseries you encountered. . . .

There are few, Augustinus concludes, who, once tasting ‘the virus of enticing pleasure,’ can “manfully” examine “the foulness of the female body.”¹⁴⁵ Augustinus may believe that Franciscus would be receptive to this critique of Laura, since he has understood that his unhappiness originated at the same time as his first glimpse of her. Yet Franciscus does not immediately assent to these assertions, having maintained throughout her innocence and nobility. It is striking that Petrarch has Augustinus revert to a more doctrinaire posture with regard to the feminine, a posture more closely aligned with the Dominican morality. But this shift in Augustinus’ position belies the mobility and inconsistencies within his general method of inquisition.¹⁴⁶ He contradicts his own advice most tellingly when advising Franciscus to forget the past, not to look back, since it was the study of his personal history that led Franciscus to gather insight into his malaise. Petrarch’s humanist enterprise, we have seen, undertakes a continual re-collection of the past, both in his prose and verse, and this effort generates the self-scrutiny that has culminated, in fictional terms, in recording the *Secretum* itself.¹⁴⁷ That Augustinus should warn

¹⁴⁵ 3.13.5–6: “. . . cogita quantum illa tibi nocuerit animo, corpori, fortune; cogita quam multa propter illam nulla utilitate perpressus es. Cogita quotiens elusus, quotiens contemptus, quotiens neglectus sis. Cogita quot blanditias in ventum effunderis, quot lamenta, quot lacrimas. Cogita illius inter hec altum sepe ingratumque supercilium, et siquid humanius, quam id breve auraque estiva mobilius! Cogita quantum tu fame illius addideris, quantum vite tue illa subtraxerit; quantum ve tu de illius nomine sollicitus, quantum illa de statu tuo semper negligens fuerit. Cogita quantum per illam ab amore Dei elongatus in quanta miserias corruisti. . . .” 3.13.8: “Pauci enim sunt qui, ex quo semel virus illud illecebrose voluptatis imbiberint, feminei corporis feditatem, de qua loquor, sat viriliter, ne dicam satis constanter, examinent.”

¹⁴⁶ As we examined above, chapter 4.

¹⁴⁷ Compare the *Confessions* X.11 and 14, where Augustine claims that one may instigate and direct an act of remembrance. This idea is touched upon by Petrarch in *De otio religioso* 79.24–25: “Domanda igitur et frenanda mens est, quibusdam quasi compeditibus cogitatio coerenda. . . .”

Franciscus with the figure of Orpheus is not accidental but ironic, for this example underscores how the singer-poet is drawn to venture into the depths out of devotion to a love imagined lost, and rescue his beloved from the darkness of oblivion.

We witness in the *Canzoniere* how powerfully for Petrarch this erotic devotion could inspire his journey of self-examination. It may be that the vernacular allows him to express more fully the classical awareness of eros and existence, without the Latin strictures from the *ecclesia*. If so Petrarch's sense of antiquity transcends matters of meter, language and diction, to the point of realizing the congruency of poetry and philosophy. The *Canzoniere* explores broader resolutions to problems raised by the *Secretum*. The title *Secretum* may in fact connote Petrarch's "enclosed valley" [*Valle chiusa*] of Vaucluse, where he resided in 1342–1343, the ostensible time of the dialogue.¹⁴⁸ Vaucluse was the place of solitude, meditation, and poetic composition, where Petrarch could sing of his missing Laura and dream of a new Rome, while facing Avignon, the place of Laura's purity and the Church's corruption.¹⁴⁹

Even more than the *Secretum*, the *Canzoniere* implicates both poet and reader in uses of memory. One thread of remembrance is found in the series of poems within the larger cycle, for example in the twelve sonnets 107 to 118. The sonnets express his feelings from the fifteenth to sixteenth years since his first encounter with Laura, the years 1342–1343.¹⁵⁰ The famous canzone 126 recalls Laura's first greeting, when "she was sitting there / humble in such glory."¹⁵¹ His remembering, he writes in canzone 37, should "consume me more" in order "that from my bitter and burdened present / I may learn how my life was joyous then."¹⁵² If his memory of Laura runs the danger of dividing him from God, the fear expressed by Augustine,

¹⁴⁸ See the discussion above in chapter 4 regarding the *secretum* as enclosure or private place.

¹⁴⁹ See sonnets 116, 117 and notes by Musa, 589–590 and Santagata, *Canzoniere*, 534–539.

¹⁵⁰ Musa (586) sees a cycle of twelve sonnets (107–118), written during the first and second stays at Vaucluse (1337–1343). Santagata (*Canzoniere*, 506) considers a smaller cycle of six (108–113), followed afterwards by other ones, similar in nature, until 118. Some of these later sonnets, according to the editor (528, 537, 540) may have been revised or even composed during the third stay at Vaucluse (1351–1353).

¹⁵¹ 126.43–44: "et ella si sedea / umile in tanta gloria." Musa, 196–197; ed. trans.

¹⁵² 37.46–48: "che 'l remembrar più mi consumi, / et quanto era mia vita allor gioiosa / m'insegnì la presenta aspra et noiosa." Musa, 60–61; ed. trans.

nonetheless this memory also leads him to the divine. Petrarch alludes to this dialectic between earth and heaven, time and eternity in canzone 142. The laurel initially shielded and strengthened him until he now finds “another path that leads to heaven.”¹⁵³ Any counsel to forget the past, such as that from Augustinus, destroys the dialectical energy sparked by sensing the temporal flow, which permits him to contrast experiences past and present, human and divine, physical and spiritual. So too the reader is constantly reminded to recollect the “scattered verses” of Petrarch’s poetry, in order that he or she may see at the end of his work, in the hymn to the Virgin, not so much a coda as a culmination and progression. In expressing Petrarch’s relation to the feminine, the *Canzoniere* returns, with variations, to moments of mood, viewpoint, and emotion. The feminine not only characterizes Laura, but also modulates his sense of human existence, in which the flow of time, marked in memory, yet contains the instant of spiritual awareness. We therefore trace a path in our analysis analogous to our course in the previous chapter. While Boccaccio critiques the mendicants for subordinating the feminine to moral ratiocination, Petrarch responds to their doctrines more introspectively.

If the first chords of the *Canzoniere* concern erotic yearning and rejection, the poet also brings the reader inward to his own unstable state. Laura, he writes, has sent his heart into “unhappy” or “hard exile” because of her refusal.¹⁵⁴ She has increased his isolation and suffering by remaining obdurate to his cries. Yet, moving beyond this echo of Augustinus’s indictment, she has also been compassionate to his suffering, for she is “the soul that God alone created noble,” who “never stops forgiving one / who with humility in heart and face, / though he offended countless times, begs mercy.”¹⁵⁵ In the erotic realm, at least, Laura incorporates both polarities of feminine character, cruelty and compassion, and Petrarch uses the language of sin and pardon that ecclesiastical writers applied to the Virgin and her supplicants. This view of “his sweet warrior,” who

¹⁵³ 142.35: “altro sentier di gire al cielo.” Musa, 232–233; ed. trans. For the danger of memory, see canzone 129.33–37: “Ma mentre tener fiso / posso al primo pensier la menta vaga, / et mirar lei et obliar me stesso, / sento Amor sì da presso / che del suo proprio error l’alma s’appaga. . . .” Musa, 212.

¹⁵⁴ 21.10: “esilio infelice.” Musa, 22–23; ed. trans. 37.37: “duro esilio.” Musa, 60–61; ed. trans.

¹⁵⁵ 23.121, 124–126: “L’alma ch’ è sol da Dio fatta gentile / . . . però di perdonar mai non è sazia / a chi col core et col semblante umile / dopo quantunque offese a mercè vene.” Musa, 32–33; ed. trans.

is by turns fierce and kind, leads the poet at one point to call her fickle [*mobile*]:

So if I tremble with a heart of ice
whenever I see her expression changed,
this fear is born of long experience:
a woman is by nature fickle,
so I know well that love's condition
lasts but little within a lady's heart.

[Però s'itremo et vo col cor gelato
qualor veggio cangiata sua figura,
questo temer d'antiche prove è nato:
femina è cosa mobile per natura,
ond'io so ben ch'un amoroso stato
in cor di donna picciol tempo dura.]¹⁵⁶

Yet in contrast to the mendicants or Boccaccio's scholar Rinieri, the loving poet conditions the detachment from his beloved by confessing a critical uncertainty principle: as she changes, he changes along with her. The poet's desire provokes her responses, and these responses in turn cause his feelings to flow and ebb. He does not remain emotionally apart from either Laura or his feelings, from feminine nature itself. Laura, he says, "left me painted with her own colors": "my great desire to relieve my heart," he adds, "takes its shape from your own changing look."¹⁵⁷

There can be, therefore, no hope for a stable, fixed vision of himself, his beloved, or the world around him. Petrarch's encounter with the feminine brings his readers into the paradox of the mutable self. It is the self, with all its emotional variations, that still provides a continuity of experience, aided by memory:

and new tears shed from old desires show
that I am still what I have always been,
not through a thousand turnings have I moved.

[e d' antichi desir lagrime nove
provan com' io son pur quel ch' i' mi soglio,
né per mille rivolte ancor son mosso.]¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ 21.1: "dolce mia guerrera" (Musa, 22–23; ed. trans.); 183.9–14; following Musa, 275. This is only time in Petrarch's vernacular writings he uses the word "femina." See also *Canz.* 112:5–8.

¹⁵⁷ 36.13: "che mi lassò de' suoi color depinto"; 72.59–60: "il gran desio per isfogare il petto / che form tien dal variato aspetto" (Musa, 58 and 120–121; ed. trans.); see also 73.70–75.

¹⁵⁸ 118.12–14; Musa, 176–177; ed. trans.

The sequence of the poems and their trajectory do show a movement in the poet, toward more explicit contemplation of the spiritual realm. Yet the “thousand turnings” indicate the backward look to his first love as time presses forward, a form of recollecting the self in its errancy and exile, with ever larger diameters of memory. The mendicant mistrust of the feminine condemns this vacillation and erotic involvement as it disturbs the rational order of the soul. For Petrarch it is love itself, however, who guides the poet upward. A “sweet light” from Laura’s eyes “shows me the way that leads to heaven.”¹⁵⁹ She is equated with the true Rome, separate from the Avignon exile. Like the Virgin, she steers “this weak little boat with her innate compassion”; she is chosen to sit at the side of God himself.¹⁶⁰

Only after her death does Petrarch address the full range of her nature, and of the nature of his love for her. Hence the poet’s debate with Love in canzone 360 ends in ambiguity. For if Love has led him astray from spiritual concerns, this same emotion granted him, Love asserts, “wings to fly beyond the sky, / through mortal things which are, / if one thinks well, the ladder to the Creator.”¹⁶¹ In the *Secretum* Franciscus argues for this conception of love’s virtue, but then abandons it when confronted with the memory of love’s turmoil.

In the final poems of the *Canzoniere* the poet, like Franciscus, recalls love’s diversion, confessing his “wayward soul” for loving mortal things, declaring his “twisted path” before the Virgin and asking for her guidance.¹⁶² But if he now directs his plea to Mary, it has been his continual love for Laura, both negatively and positively, that has brought him to this juncture. She remains “my dear and faithful guide,” he sings, “who led me to the world and now leads me / by

¹⁵⁹ 72.2–3: “un dolce lume / che mi mostra la via ch’ al ciel conduce”; Musa, 116.

¹⁶⁰ 206.39–40: “questa stanca novicella / col governo di sua pietà natia”; Musa, 298.

¹⁶¹ 360.137–139: “. . . da volar sopra ‘l ciel li avea dat’ ali / per le cose mortali, / che son scala al Fattor, chi ben l’estima.” Revising Musa, 503–505. Note the neo-Platonic references and allusion to Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*. Nohac notes Petrarch’s citation of Bonaventure’s name in one of his invectives, but adds “Peut-être, à vrai dire, Pétrarque préférerait-il exalter ces grands hommes [of scholasticism] que les lire” (*Pétrarque e l’humanisme*, 2:216).

¹⁶² 365.1–8 (Musa, 508): “T’vo piangendo i miei passati tempi / i quai posi in amar cosa mortale / senza levarmi a volo, abbiend’ io l’ale / per dar porse di me non bassi esempi. / Tu che vedi i miei mali indegni et empì, / Re del Cielo, invisibile, immortale: / soccori a l’alma disviata et frale / e ‘l suo defetto di tua grazia adempi. . . .”; 366.61–65 (Musa, 512–513): “Vergine dolce et pio, / ove ‘l fallo abondò la grazia abonda. / Con le ginocchia de la mene inchine / prego che sia mia scorta / et la mia torta via drizzi a buon fine.” Ed. trans.

a better path to a life without troubles”, in other words, to the *felicitas* sought by Franciscus.¹⁶³ If Laura has shown Petrarch the power of eros, she has nonetheless disclosed the realm of spiritual peace, “without troubles.” In canzone 359 Laura comes to console the anguished poet, and asks him:

. . . Why do you still weep and torment yourself?
 How much better to have raised wings above the earth,
 and weighed mortal things
 and all your sweet fleeting chatter
 on an honest scale
 and followed me—if you love me so much—
 gathering finally one of these branches [of palm and laurel].

[. . . A che pur piangi et ti distempre?
 Quanto era meglio alzar da terra l’ali,
 et le cose mortali
 et queste dolci tue fallaci ciance
 librar con giusta lance,
 et seguire me (s’ è ver che tanto m’ami)
 cogliendo omai qualcun di questi rami.]¹⁶⁴

Here Laura’s words echo those of Love in the debate in the following poem (360): the poet, truly seeking his beloved, will transcend the things of this world. Her question is lanced with irony, for the poet’s “sweet fleeting chatter” has pursued her, leaving her traces. His simultaneous awareness of its transitory, deceptive quality has made him alive to his love’s spiritual potential. In seeking his beloved, he should not forget his missteps.

Petrarch’s poetry, in expressing turmoil, change, opportunities seized and lost, shows its readers the existential peril of emotional life. Similar to the voyage on the sea of time, there is no safe haven from passion, and therefore from the feminine, either as an object of desire or as one’s own vacillating and unpredictable feelings. In contrast to the mendicants, who see the feminine as a siren seducing the soul toward death, Petrarch, like Boccaccio, views it as an existential, amoral dimension of life, to be embraced well or badly. To the humanists, reason is a poor match for passion’s power. Love has broken, the poet claims, the bounds of reason: “reason is dead

¹⁶³ 357.2–4 (Musa, 490): “la mia fida et cara duce / che mi condusse al mondo, ormi conduce / per miglior via a vita senza affanni.”

¹⁶⁴ 359.38–44; Musa, 494.

/ which held the bridle and cannot fight against my will.”¹⁶⁵ “The senses reign, and reason is dead; / from one pleasing desire comes another,” he writes when recalling his first sight of Laura.¹⁶⁶ Petrarch has qualms about this danger, in the voice of Augustinus, and later in the words of *Ratio* [Reason] in the *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*.¹⁶⁷ The conflict between his emotional will and ecclesiastical teaching about rational control surfaces in sonnet 140:

She who teaches us to love and suffer
and wants my great desire, my burning hope
to be reined by reason, shame and reverence,
is angry at our boldness, more than she shows.

[Quella ch' amare et sofferir ne 'nsegna
e vol che 'gran desio, l'accesa spene
ragion, vergogna, et reverenza affrene,
di nostro ardir fra se stessa si sdegna.]¹⁶⁸

The “she” in the poem may be read as the Church, the Virgin, or as Laura herself.¹⁶⁹ It is ultimately not reason, but Laura and her “chaste and compassionate love” that restrain his passionate excess and show him his proper way:

. . . glance so divine to bring man happiness,
now fierce in reining in a bold mind
from that which one justly denies,
now quick in comforting my fragile life:
this lovely variation was the source
of my salvation, which otherwise was lost.

[divino sguardo da far l'uom felice,
or fiero in affrenar la mente arditata
a quel che guistamente si disdice,
or presto a confortar mia frale vita:
questo bel variar fu la radice
di mia salute, ch' altramente era ita.]¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ 73.25–26: “et la ragione è morta / che tenea 'l freno et contrastar nol pote.” Musa, 122.

¹⁶⁶ 211.7–8: “regnano i sensi et la ragion è morta / de l'un vago desio l'altro risorge.” Musa, 308–309.

¹⁶⁷ *De remediis* dialogue 1:69. This will be discussed in more detail below, in chapter 7.

¹⁶⁸ 140.5–8; adapting Musa, *Canzoniere*, 229; see 141.7.

¹⁶⁹ Musa, *Canzoniere*, 609–610, sees “she” first as Church authority, then Laura; Santagata, *Canzoniere* 681, views “she” as Laura.

¹⁷⁰ 351.9–14 (revising Musa, 485); see also 351.1–2: “Dolci durezza et placide repulse / piene di casto amore et di pietate. . .”

The mendicant language of bridling emotion is employed by Petrarch to show that only a greater emotion, here his virtuous love for Laura, can tame a lesser love, his sensual desire for her beauty. Augustinus unwittingly pointed to this fact, without appreciating how Laura could elicit both forms of love dialectically. Laura exhibits in these closing sonnets of the *Canzoniere* the two aspects of severity and compassion the poet felt in the erotic realm, only here these aspects, “this lovely variation,” leads the poet now to the divine. What the moralizing of the mendicants had split far asunder in their vision of the feminine—the cruel stepmother and the merciful Virgin—are here joined together in his gaze of Laura, as are the other two sides of the feminine: its sensuality and its purity, reflected in the poet’s passionate pursuit. In the poet’s vision of Laura, the dialectic becomes redoubled. This redoubled dialectic between these different emotional states is enabled by another quality of the feminine troubling to the Dominicans, the variability and mutability of emotion. But it is this dialectic that carries the poet forward to a greater understanding of himself.

The humanist emphasis on the feminine breaks decisively from the model of mendicant moral psychology, which is predicated on the stability of the *ratio*. To Petrarch and Boccaccio, the flow of emotions, like that of time, may sharpen or obscure the insight of reason, but it is never mastered by this faculty. The security or stasis of the *ratio* is a chimera. Understanding human existence as temporal, the humanists heighten their sensitivity to the historical moment. They express how successive moments in time mark the changes in one’s self and in one’s point of view wrought by emotion. They use the qualities associated with femininity to signify this emotional, variable part of the soul that often decisively determines one’s path in life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SENESCENCE AND RENASCENCE

Our study has explored how Trecento humanism contributed to the history of philosophy in significant ways. While the fourteenth-century ecclesiastics carried on the metaphysical traditions of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, Petrarch and Boccaccio searched instead for an understanding of humanity in its temporal existence. Any insight into humanity is temporal, of the moment. One's grip on this insight is unsteady, and this unsteady and momentary quality is the prime manifestation of existence. In later life, both humanists found some solace in the post-Socratic morality that the Church espoused. There remains in their writings from this period the existential imprint of their earlier ideas, in particular the awareness of time's flow and the voice of subjectivity. Yet opposing the conventional moral dicta of the ecclesia created a tension too much for them to bear. They drew back, however reluctantly, from the flux of experiential insight into the haven of metaphysical morality. Their ambivalent withdrawal from the sea of experience would shape their legacy. Although Boccaccio's later Latin writings are typically considered to be his contribution to humanism, as they concern themselves overtly with classical themes and models and are written in a classicized language, these works often pass by the sceptical search for existential meaning that characterized the humanism of the *Decameron*, and instead posit *a priori* the moral claims they wish to validate. Petrarch's position toward the Stoic verities is, we have seen, marked by inconsistency. We can witness in fact how the Quattrocento debates over the importance of Stoicism follow upon the thinking of Boccaccio and Petrarch at their lives' close.

In a letter from 1373, two years before his death, Boccaccio writes to Mainardo Cavalcanti that he should prevent the women of his household from reading the *Decameron*. The stories are "common trifles," some of which are "less decent and opposed to modest ways," and can not only move the most morally secure to thoughts of wickedness, but also infect weaker, more shameless souls with the "obscene virus of concupiscence." He tells Cavalcanti that one would

hardly excuse him by saying: “He wrote this when he was young, under the sway of a greater power.” Part of his reason for dissuading him is to protect his reputation: “Those who read the work will consider me a filthy beast, a dirty old man, a man of impure ways, a foul, evil-tongued and zealous teller of others’ misdeeds.”¹ Now Boccaccio sees a correlation between language and lust, words and desire, that he had explicitly rejected in the *Decameron’s* two apologiae (IV.intro and Conclusion).

Boccaccio’s reservations about his masterwork, however tempered they may be by his interest in preparing a manuscript of it during this time,² surface again in his lectures on Dante’s *Commedia* and in his *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* [*Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*]. Boccaccio declares that “a type of comic poets” was banned by Plato from his Republic. These comedians elicited the dangerous, sensual impulses among their listeners, and so posed a threat to public order:

And because the comic actors often portrayed, among shameless matters, the adulteries that the comedies recounted, they so whetted the appetites of the men and women in the audience to desire and undertake similar actions, and thus these actors so corrupted and made dissolute in all types of shamelessness [*disonestà*] their good morals and healthy minds.³

¹ *Le lettere*, ed. Francesco Corazzini (Florence: Sansoni, 1877), 298–299: “Sane quia inclitas mulieres tuas domesticas nugas meas legere promiseris non laudo . . . nosti quot ibi sint minus decentia et adverstantia honestati, quot Vereris infaustae aculei, quot in scelus impellentia etiam si sint ferrea pectora, a quibus etsi non ad incestuosum actum illustres impellantur feminae et potissimae quibus sacer pudor frontibus insidet, subeunt tamen passu tacitu estus illecebres, et impudicas animas obscena concupiscentia tabe nonnumquam inficiunt, irritantque, quod omnino ne contingat agendum est. . . . Extimabunt enim legentes me spurdigum leonum, incestuosum senem, impurum hominem, turpiloquum maledicum et alienorum scelerum avidum relatore. Non enim ubique est, qui in excusationem meam consurgens dicat: — *Iuvenis scripsit, et maioris coactus imperio. . .*” Emphasis in original.

² See Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 122–129, on the development of the work over time to its final form. The autograph MS Hamilton 90 in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek dates ca. 1370. Battaglia Ricci notes: “Il confronto tra l’Hamilton e i codici più antichi lascia infatti individuare varianti tali da legittimare il sospetto che l’opera sia stata fatta oggetto di una continua opera di riscrittura da parte dell’autore. . . .” (123, n. 4).

³ *Esposizioni*, canto 1.i (litt.).74ff.; “una spezie di poeti comici” (84); quotation 87: “E, per ciò che spesso vi si facevano intorno agli adulteri, che i comedi recitavano, di disonesto cose, si movevano gli appetiti degli uomini e delle femini riguardanti a simili cose desiderare e adoperare; di che i buoni costumi e le mente sane si corrampevano e ad ogni disonestà discorrevano.” Cf. *Genealogie* 14.19; 2:738ff., esp. 743.14–19, here explicitly criticizing Terence, Plautus, and Ovid: “Hi quidem seu mentis innata lascivia, seu lucri cupidine, et desiderio vulgaris applausus, scelestis

The problem, therefore, lies not in the art of poetry itself, but in the use of the art. As he states in the *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, "For this is the fault [*culpa*] of lascivious minds."⁴ With some reluctance, Boccaccio seems to view the *Decameron* as a work of comic poetry, to be excluded from civic lecture as well as from Cavalcanti's household.⁵

In these vernacular lectures and in his Latin *Genealogy*, Boccaccio defends the poet as a moral writer, a guardian of philosophical truth, indeed, as the first theologian. He cites Petrarch's *Familiares* X.4, his letter to this brother Gherardo, to justify the place of poetry among the moral arts; Boccaccio praises Dante and Petrarch for exemplifying its practice.⁶ Petrarch not only composed didactic writings, such as his *Eclogues*, *On the Life of Solitude*, and *Remedies for Fortune*; he also led an upright way of life, proving himself an *exemplar honesti* [a model of morality] and *catholice sanctitatis norma* [pattern of Catholic virtue].⁷ While placing his own Latin poems, the *Buccolicum carmen*, in this category of proper poetry, Boccaccio leaves the *Decameron* unmentioned. The concept of the poet-theologian, or poet-philosopher, is connected to severer, more overt moral strictures, and differs from the practice of poetic thinking that we have examined in much of the writing of the humanists.⁸ Genuine poets for Boccaccio now convey the truths

compositis fabulis, eas, mimis introductis, recitabant in scenis, ex quibus lascivientium pectora provocabantur in scelera et constantium agitabantur virtus, et omnis fere morum disciplina reddebatur enervis."

⁴ *Genealogie* 14.6 (2:699.2): "Lascivientium quippe ingeniorum culpa hec est."

⁵ Boccaccio was not entirely consistent in his view of the value of poetry. In *Genealogie* 14.9 he cites Terence and Plautus for their realistic portrayals of life, and notes how poetry may console one's losses and restore one's strength, an aim of the *Decameron* mentioned in the Proem (2:707.11–15; 708.14–709.9); and in 14.10 (711.13–21) he recognizes how even a "chattering little old woman" (*delirantem aniculum*) can tell ghost stories that are worthy for their diversion and lessons about fortune. On these ambiguities in the *Genealogie* see also Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 47.

⁶ *Esposizioni* Li.77 and *Genealogie* 14.10 (2:710.24–711.4). He then modestly adds: "Possum preterea et meum Buccolicum carmen inducere, cuius sensus ego sum conscius, sed omnittendum censui, quic nec adhuc tanti sum, ut inter prestantur vires misceri debeam, et quia propria sunt alienis linquenda sermonibus" (2:711.5–8). See also Petrarch's "Invective contra medicum" in *Invectives*, 100–120. Among the commentators, see Witt, "Coluccio Salutati and the Conception of the *Poeta Theologus* in the Fourteenth Century," 542–546; Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, 121–124; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2:693–697.

⁷ *Genealogie* 14.19 (2:741.21–742.3).

⁸ Whereas Boccaccio explicitly indicts the comedians in these later works, Petrarch, we may recall, praised their productions for ideas "ut e mediis philosophiae fontibus eruta videantur" in his early *Rerum memorandarum libri*, here reading Seneca

of philosophy through allegory, “veil[ing] truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction.”⁹

As we can see, Boccaccio maintains in these later works a conception of morality close to that of his mendicant contemporaries. Elsewhere in his discussion of the *Commedia* he warns against the powers of sensual passion. Dante’s “mental sleep” symbolizes how reason may fall subject to carnal desire; even more forcefully he notes that the leopard in Canto I is an image for the vice of *lussuria* or “carnal concupiscence,” and laments “how many robust youths, how many fair ladies . . . have pursued this dishonest pleasure without any restraint [*senza alcun freno*].”¹⁰

Boccaccio warns more urgently against sensual desire in his biographical series *On Famous Women* [*De mulieribus claris*].¹¹ His story of Iole tricking Hercules, making him “effeminate with pleasure,” serves as a metaphor for lust’s insidious mastery over our better nature.¹² Lust overcomes the guard of prudence, and “the enemy of modesty and counselor of wrongdoing casts shame and honor aside, makes

(III.91.1, p. 177). Yet in 1373 he expresses a certain reserve toward the “lightness” [*levitas*] of the *Decameron*’s subject matter (*Sen.* XVII.3, in Rossi, ed., *Griselda*, 75). See Glending Olson, “Petrarch’s View of the *Decameron*,” *Modern Language Notes* 91, no. 1 (1976): 69–79.

⁹ *Genealogie* 14.7 (2:699.31–32): “velamento fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere.” The astute translation is by Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 39. The Latin *contegere* means both “to cover” and “to protect,” and therefore fits well Boccaccio’s meaning of poetry’s service to philosophy. See also his *De casibus illustrium virorum*, which compares poetry to sacred scripture: “Nam prout illa [sancta pagina] divinae mentis arcana prophetis futura que sub figurarum tegmenie reseravit: Sic et haec [poesis] celso suorum conceptus sub figmentorum velamine tradere orsa est. Et si optimus homo sit / poesis optima adparebit”: *De casibus illustrium virorum*, ed. Louis Brewer Hall (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962), 89 (fol. XXXIIr).

¹⁰ *Esposizioni*, I.ii (all.).33, 93–95, 107: “Bene adunque si può questa bestia dire esser la concupiscenzia carnale. . . .”; 105: “Quanti robusti giovani, quante vaghe donne . . . senza alcun freno questo disonesto diletto hanno seguito. . . .”

¹¹ *On Famous Women / De mulieribus claris*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2001). See the studies on the work’s inconsistencies, first by Attilio Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio* (Trieste: J. Dase, 1879), 79–81; and by Constance Jordan, “Boccaccio’s In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in *De mulieribus claris*,” in Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson, ed., *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987), 25–47; Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State UP, 1992), 9–31; and Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 70, 180–182, 222–223.

¹² *Famous Women*, 92 (cap. XXIII.4): “effeminasse lasciviis”

ready the pigsty, and incites the grunting lovers to the allurements of copulation."¹³

Lust, or the poet who incites it, must therefore be suppressed and kept outside the boundaries of decent society. Immodesty is no longer only in the ear of him who hears it, as Boccaccio claimed in the *Decameron's* conclusion, but also in the words of him who speaks it. Conversely, as he writes to Cavalcanti, listeners must be protected by the same boundaries from the harm of passion and its purveyors. *On Famous Women* imposes limits upon women, the senses and the art of narrative itself.¹⁴ Except for a few important inconsistencies, Boccaccio retreats within the pale of a recognized morality, one which he subversively countered in the *Decameron*.¹⁵

Parents should watch their daughters, he instructs his readers in his tale of "Leana, a Prostitute," for "[i]f the feminine tendency toward wantonness is not strictly curbed and restrained [*austerulis coherceatur frenis*] by the unsleeping vigilance of mothers, it will give way at some point, even without temptation."¹⁶ Among other attributes, women are inherently soft [Pref. 4], fickle [I.6], lewd [VII.5] and, as one sees in Iole, cunning. Though Boccaccio criticizes parents for imprisoning their unfortunate daughters behind the hard walls of the convent [XLV.6], he appears to agree with the mendicants regarding the need for strict oversight over a women's nature.

Boccaccio's critique of women in his *On the Fall of Illustrious Men* [*De casibus illustrium virorum*] also bears a certain resemblance to the way the friars assessed female character. Boccaccio dedicated the second redaction of the work in 1373 to Mainardo Cavalcanti, the

¹³ *Famous Women*, 94–97 (cap. XXIII.14): "Tunc pudoris hostis et scelerum suator, rubore et honestate fugatis, parato volutabro porcis, gannientes effundit in illecebre coitus. . . ." Ed. trans.

¹⁴ See his moral justification for his stories in *Famous Women*, 4–6 (Dedication. 9): ". . . provocato in vires ingenio, quo plurimum vales, non solum ne supereris patiari, sed ut superes quascunque egregia virtute coneris; ut, uti coporore leta iuventate ac florida venustate conspicua es, sic pre ceteris, non tantum coevis tuis, sed priscis etiam, animi integritate prestantior fias. . . ." Worth noting is the humanist emphasis on *emulatio*.

¹⁵ See Hortis's claim that Boccaccio "diventato vecchio e fattosi moralista," *Studi*, 72, also 88, 130. Davidsohn notes Boccaccio's bequest of collection of relicts to the monastery Maria della Campora; *Geschichte von Florenz* 4.1:5.

¹⁶ *Famous Women*, 206–207 (cap. L.5): ". . . quarum petulca facultas, ni austerulis coherceatur frenis et a matribus potissime observantia retrahatur vigili, aliquando, etiam non impulsa, labitur. . . ." Ed. trans.

recipient of his letter on the *Decameron* from the same year.¹⁷ In the section “Against Women” [*In Mulieres*] he decries “the delightful mortal evil of women”: “for a most covetous animal is woman, wrathful, unstable, disloyal, libidinous, grouchy, longing more for vain than for solid things.”¹⁸ While some women should be praised “more than men” for their virtue, this is akin to wondering at a giant’s strength in a pygmy, amazing for its rarity.¹⁹ Missing from Boccaccio’s rhetoric is talk of woman as the mother of sin so prevalent in the mendicant writings. When discussing the Fall, for example, he emphasizes the mutual disobedience of Adam and Eve more than Eve’s particular fault. His moral about the Fall also stresses its most general consequence: human depravity, continually generated by original sin. Yet even as he demands that the reader reflect upon his or her own failings and fate, he alludes at the same time to the conventional moral difference between the sexes: “If Adam, composed by divine hand, is punished by such a severe penalty for a single act of disobedience, what do you think is to be done with you, as one born of woman?”²⁰

Corresponding to his sense of a woman’s physical charm and moral lightness, Boccaccio writes vigorously against the dangers of the unfettered perception of the senses themselves. This sentiment contends with those expressed in the *Decameron*. There Boccaccio emphasized the openness and delight of the senses, beginning with the eyewitness accounts of the plague. The male servants, who helped

¹⁷ Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 214–215.

¹⁸ *De casibus*, 47 (f. XIIr): “O mortalium praedulce malum mulier. . . . Avarissimum quippe animal est foemina / iracundum / instabile / infidele / libidinosum / truculentum / vani potius quam certi avidum.”

¹⁹ *De casibus*, 48 (fol. XIIv): “Quis dubitet quin in tam magna multitudine reperiantur aliquae piaae / modestae / ac santissimae / Et dignissimae reverentia summa mulieres? Sino christianas ex quibus plurimae grandi mentis / integritate / virginitate / simplicitate / castitate / constantia / aliis meritis florere. Set et gentiles aliquae summis praeconis laudes meruere. Quae siquando reperianture amandae colendae Et pro viribus extollendae sunt ultra quam homines. Nam sicuti magis quam in briareo in pygmaeo miranda esset virtus [reading *virtus* for *vittus*] herculea: Sic in muliere quam in homine magis commendanda. Set quam rarissimae sunt.”

²⁰ *De casibus*, 26–27 (f. Iv–IIr): “Invidia motus adfuit hostis: falsaue suggestione / in ardorem superandae legis impositae: mentem mulieris illexit: et illa viri. O caeca rerum cupiditas. He quibus rerum omnium dante deo / erat imperium: dum se etiam per inobedientiam deo similes effici arbitrantur: misere coeperunt esse mortales. . . . Si adamus divina manu compositus / ob inobedientiam unam / tam gravi poena multatus est. Quid de te homo natus ex muliere quod faciendum sit existimas?”

their mistresses dress themselves in the dearth of female help, may have led, he claims, to greater sexual laxity, but it is this laxity that permits the *brigata* to travel together and declaim their stories, and that justifies Boccaccio's entire enterprise.²¹ Here he sounds a different chord. At the end of his story of Medea he comments:

I should not omit this observation: we must not give too much freedom to our eyes. Their wandering gaze dazzles us, makes us envious, and excites us to concupiscence. . . . The eyes are the gateway of the spirit: through them lust [*libido*] sends messages to the mind; through them love sighs and lights hidden fires. . . . Between heaven and earth there is no safe direction [*tutum iter*] for the eyes to turn. If one must use them, they should be severely restrained lest they fall into sin ["acri sunt cohibendi, ne lasciviant, freno"].²²

Boccaccio's use of the word for 'restraint,' *frenum*, is the one used by the mendicants for curbing the passions, and the same expression he employs for bridling a young woman's proclivity to pleasure. The senses, emotions, and femininity are each unstable and perilous, and demand constant vigilance. By closing his narrative in this way, Boccaccio is also guiding, or restraining, the reader's interpretation in a way similar to the method of the mendicant moralist. This restraint differs from the hermeneutical latitude afforded by the *Decameron* narrators and their able authorial advocate.²³

We should note nonetheless that the force of the biographical record brings Boccaccio repeatedly to emphasize the accomplishments of women, contradicting the view of their inherent weakness.²⁴ He recognizes Semiramis of Assyria for maintaining "kingship and military discipline while accomplishing many great deeds worthy of even the most powerful men."²⁵ He writes of Nicostrata that "her

²¹ See *Decameron*, Intro.29.

²² *Famous Women*, 76–79 (cap. XVII.11–13): "Sed, ne omiserim, non omnis oculis prestanda licentia est. Eis enim spectantibus, splendores cognoscimus, invidiam introducimus, concupiscentias attrahimus omnes. . . . et, cum pectoris ianua sint, per eos menti nuntios micit libido, per eos cupido inflat superbia et cecos incendit ignes. . . . Nullum illis inter utrumque [celum, terram] tutum iter est; quod si omnino peragendum sit, acri sunt cohibendi, ne lasciviant, freno." Ed. trans.

²³ See also the moral insertions in XIV.8 (Hypermnestra); XXII.8 f. (Medusa); XXVI.8 (Sibyl). Virginia Brown notes that many of these sections may have been added after the work's first drafting; see Introduction, xiii. See also the remarkable comment in LV.14 (Veturia): "Mulierbris est mundus, sic et homines muliebres" (*Famous Women*, 230); cited by Hortis, *Studi*, 86.

²⁴ See also Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Women*, 9–10.

²⁵ *Famous Women*, 18–19 (cap. II.6): ". . . eam militaremque disciplinam servant, et, mentita sexum, grandia multa et robustissimis viris egregia operata est." Ed. trans.

intellect was so versatile that with constant study she even learned the art of foretelling the future,” and that she invented the Latin alphabet.²⁶ Clever and ingenious women, we have seen, populate the pages of the *Decameron*, so to a certain degree Boccaccio has continued his service to women through this later work. But now, explicitly, the end is moral. In his Preface to *On Famous Women* he compares his undertaking with Petrarch’s *On Illustrious Men* [*De viris illustribus*], seeing his work as a set of historical *exempla* to move his readers, women as well as men, toward virtue and away from vice.²⁷

A more telling inheritance from his earlier work is Boccaccio’s appreciation of temporality. The narrative “I” colors his remarks, which, in their subjectivity, place the author, reader, and subject into an historical relation with one another. *On the Fall of Illustrious Men* draws upon the techniques of dialogue practiced in the *Decameron*; Boccaccio speaks in his own voice, even allowing himself to be rebuked for his flagging spirits by a figure of Petrarch: “Have you forgotten,” Petrarch tells him, “that man is born to work?”²⁸ In the first historical account of *On Famous Women*, the life of Semiramis, he writes that “time has obliterated any knowledge of her parents” and that regarding her own accomplishments he states “*vetustas absorbit*”: the passing of time has devoured them.²⁹ At the end of this treatise Boccaccio excuses the omission of other famous women “for Time, which triumphs over Fame, has engulfed the majority.”³⁰ Boccaccio overtly refers to Petrarch’s *Triumphus Temporis* that followed his *Triumphus Fame*.³¹

²⁶ *Famous Women*, 106–107 (cap. XXVII.1): “. . . adeo versatilis fuit ingenii, ut ad vaticinium usque vigilanti penetraret studio. . .” Ed. trans.

²⁷ *Famous Women*, 10–11 (Pref. 7). See Constance Jordan’s critique of the exemplary nature of the tales, since they pertain to civic spheres typically denied to women: *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1990), 37.

²⁸ *De casibus*, 186; f. XCv: “An oblitus es quod ad laborem nascitur homo?” See also Hall’s preface to this work, ix; and Hortis, 121–122. The *De casibus* also describes its purpose, following Horace, as *delectabile* and *utile* (25; f. Ir), terms similar to the *Decameron*’s Proem.14.

²⁹ *Famous Women*, 16–17 (cap. II.1): “. . . a quibus tamen parentibus genus duxerit, annositas abstulit. . .” (ed. trans.); 20 (cap. II.12).

³⁰ *Famous Women*, 472–473 (Concl. 3): “quia plurimas fame triumphator tempus assumpsit.” Ed. trans.

³¹ See the sun’s meditation in *Triumphus Temporis*, lines 6–30 (*Rime e Trionfi*, 790–791) on the vanity of mortal fame with respect to the course of time.

We have seen Petrarch comment upon the provisional quality of historical knowledge in his biographies of famous men. With regard to the formal finish of their own writings, both humanists acknowledge the power of time by revising their works throughout their lives. For Boccaccio this entailed copying and structuring the *Decameron* text even as he cautioned readers about its perils.³²

In his *Genealogy* Boccaccio views Charon, the escort to the Underworld, as expressing the existential power of temporality. Through his reading of Servius, Boccaccio derives his name from *chronos*, and explains that he carries souls from the shore of birth across the river of time to the port of death.³³ Nonetheless Boccaccio does bring forth the religious and moral dimension to this figure when he declares that Charon, as Time, is the child of Erebus, “namely the profound counsel of God,” and that the currents of the river Acheron signify how “the whirlpool of sins and of the mouth of hell devours us.”³⁴

A similar transitional quality marks Petrarch’s dialogues, *On the Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune*, which the *Genealogy* cites for their moral value. In the Prefaces, as we have witnessed, Petrarch underscores the unremitting power of temporality that disrupts the identity between thought and Being. Yet in the dialogues themselves, the figure of Reason (*Ratio*) is typically granted the first and last words of advice. The *Remedies* do not present the reader with the human *personae* that endowed his *Secretum* with its hermeneutical complexity and psychological force. Instead Petrarch, through the voice of Reason, gives voice to the conventional moral categories espoused by the mendicants and at times by the *Secretum*’s Augustinus.

In the dialogue between Joy and Reason in “Love Affairs,” Reason describes the effects and remedies of love in words reminiscent of

³² Battaglia Ricci, *Boccaccio*, 122–129.

³³ *Esp.* III.ii (all.).21–22; *Genealogie* 1.33 (1:62). The editor of the *Esposizioni*, Giorgio Padoan, notes that the etymology is not found in Servius’s Virgil-commentary and may stem from a faulty manuscript in Boccaccio’s possession: 2:817–818.

³⁴ *Esposizioni*, II.ii (all.).20: “Per lo quale assai apertamente veder si puote intendersi il tempo, per ciò che il Tempo fu figliuolo d’Erebo, cioè del profondo consiglio di Dio. . . .”; III.ii (all.).17: “. . . e né altrimenti che’ fiumi con le loro circunvoluzioni talvolta trangugian le navi e’ navicanti, così noi trangiottisce la circunvoluzione de’ peccati e della bocca infernale”; see also Boccaccio’s interpretation that the ships transporting souls are “le nostre concupiscenze . . . leggiere e mutabili” (II.ii [all.].19). Boccaccio omits this religious signification in the *Genealogie*.

Augustinus. Love is an entanglement with a woman inherently “wanton” [*impudice*]; it makes one feeble and servile; it fixes one’s mind on the realm of visible delight, diverting one’s gaze from the eternal. The poets who have written about love were engaged in folly, whereas the wise man, like the Stoic sage, avoids the “inner turmoil and anguish” [“tumulto atque angore animi”] fomented by this passion. Even more sternly than Augustinus, Reason roundly declares that poetry inflames love, rather than moderating its effects. Reason does follow the fictional Church Father in citing Cicero and Horace for justifying its claims, and it issues remedies—change of place, avoiding memories of the beloved—that are similar to the ones Augustinus proposes in the *Secretum*. Yet since Reason and Joy are disembodied figures, the work does not permit the reader to question their personalities in the way encouraged by the earlier, extended conversation between Augustinus and Franciscus. The words of Reason coldly assert, in tones estranged from those typically uttered by Petrarch’s own authorial persona, that “the sensual passion is not caused by nature, or fate, or the stars, or anything else, but by a giddy head and wanton notions.”³⁵ If Reason maintains a bedrock voluntarism, that one may choose to avoid love, this claim is void of the humanity normally found in Petrarch’s letters or even in the statements of Augustinus.³⁶

Yet in his own voice too Petrarch could adapt the traditional mendicant rhetoric against the dangers of sex and femininity. Writing in 1352 to his brother Gherardo, a member of the strict Carthusian order, Petrarch says he is following Gherardo’s counsels to achieve greater spiritual security: “I do not dare say that I have arrived safely in port,” he writes, using the sea-metaphor, “but I have done what sailors do when surprised by storm, taking my ship leeward of an island, away from wind and wave.” The last of his counsels, after confession and prayer, is to avoid women:

... the company of women, without which sometimes I believed I could not live, I now fear more gravely than death, and however often

³⁵ Dialogue 1.69. *On the Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 197, 203, 204; *De remediis*, 1:320, 328, 330: “Ad extremum proderit, excusationibus ac falsis opinionibus reiectis, veras induere: nichil hic naturam, nichil fatum, nichil stellas agere, nichil denique nisi solam animi levitatem atque liberum iudicium.”

³⁶ Ratio does at other times recognize the flux of existence and the inconsistencies of human knowledge: e.g. 2.17 (*De remediis*, 1:644); 2.83 (1:890); see also its statement “Fusca enim et ambigua merx est homo” (1.79; 1:358).

I am assaulted by the most bitter temptations, nonetheless should I bear in mind what a woman is, all temptation immediately flies away and I return to my freedom and peace.³⁷

Petrarch is adapting, rather than adopting, the clerical ideas. For Petrarch women in the first degree threaten his “freedom and peace,” his contemplative stillness. In *On the Life of Solitude* he reiterates that women may disturb one’s repose, recalling Ambrose’s statement that the first feminine companionship forced Adam out of paradise.³⁸ *On Religious Leisure*, written also to Gherardo, notes how the passions themselves upset one’s serenity, being inherently fluctuating and unstable.³⁹ These writings do not indict women for their “unclean” sinfulness, in contrast to the mendicants, but rather for their restlessness, and Petrarch tempers this accusation by the context of his remarks, which stress inherent human vacillation and discordance.⁴⁰ His criticism is therefore not theological, and its moral point stems from his feeling for existential fragility. And yet Petrarch anticipates the remarks of the later Boccaccio by stating in *On Religious Leisure* that “we must control and restrain our minds. . . . so that our eyes may not open a path for dangerous sights.”⁴¹ The relation among women, sexual temptation, and inner disturbance will be echoed by mendicants and humanists alike in the coming generations, even by those like Alberti, who sensed keenly the ontological instability and epistemological insecurity of the human condition.

Nonetheless both Petrarch and Boccaccio in their final years retain the sense of *humanitas* as showing compassion for the afflicted, for those subjected to the perils of this condition. At the opening of his letter to Cavalcanti warning about his work, Boccaccio comments on his friend’s expression of sympathy for his penurious and sickly

³⁷ *Fam.* X.5.29: “. . . consortium femine, sine quo interdum extimaverim non posse vivere, morte tunc gravius pertimesco, et quanquam sepe tentationibus turber acerrimis, tamen dum in animum redit quid est femina, omnis tentatio confestim avolat et ego ad libertatem et ad pacem meam redeo”; the dating is that of Guiseppa Fraccasetti, as cited in Wilkins, *Petrarch’s Correspondence*, 65.

³⁸ *De vita solitaria* 2.IV.3–7; also 2.II.1. The editor of the *De vita*, Christophe Carraud, cites the reference as Ambrose’s Letter 49 (PL 16, 1153–1154): *De vita*, 417.

³⁹ *De otio religioso*, 68.5–12.

⁴⁰ See *Fam* X.5.13–18, which ends with Terence’s line “volo nolo, nolo volo.”

⁴¹ Following the example of the saints: *On Religious Leisure*, 111–112; *De otio religioso*, 79.24–28: “Domanda igitur et frenanda mens est. . . . Hinc est ut de salute anime cum oculis paciscendum sit, ut nec illi periculosis aspectis iter pandant. . . .”

state. “To shed slight tears are a sign of your humanity and compassionate heart.”⁴² Boccaccio employs adroitly his antithetical phrasing as he goes on to delineate the deficiencies of Stoic impassivity:

For even if certain men of the strongest sort have born the greatest injuries of fortune dry-eyed beyond the limits of nature [*praeter naturam*], it is not for this reason damnable to have granted a little something to suffering nature: for just as those who go unmoved through harsh events may be considered no less stone-like and iron-hearted than strong, so too these, who in adversity shed a few tears, show themselves as men [*homines*] and sensitive beings.⁴³

Boccaccio contrasts these two states of existence in order to sound the relational chord of compassion, humanity and nature. Christ himself, he tells Cavalcanti, wept for his fallen friend Lazarus, thus leaving posterity with an example of “complete charity toward a friend,” of the empathetic quality of *humanitas*.⁴⁴ It is this quality and relational chord that resides at the center of the *Decameron* and generates the narrative enterprise, from the author’s first words in the Proem to the ultimate tale of Griselda and Gualtieri.

Petrarch appreciated Boccaccio’s sense of compassion. We have noted how the story of Griselda in particular attracted his attention, and in a letter, perhaps from the year of his death, he told Boccaccio of the responses of two readers to his translation of the tale. One remained unmoved, like the Stoic discussed by Boccaccio. The other, however, earned Petrarch’s deep respect for weeping over Griselda’s plight. Petrarch cites Juvenal’s fifteenth satire in approbation:

Mollissima corda
Humano generi dare se natura fatetur,
Que lachrymas dedit, hec nostri pars optima sensus [lines 131–133]

⁴² *Lettere*, 296: “Pauculas lacrymulas emisisse humanitatis ac passionis passi cordis est signum.”

⁴³ *Lettere*, 296: “Nam etsi quidem fortissimi viri praeter naturam sicca facie gravissimas fortunae pertulerunt iniurias, non propterea damnabile est aliquantulum cessisse naturae laboranti: nuam uti qui sicco vultu diros eventus transeunt obstinati ferreique, non minus quam fortes forsan habendi sunt, sic et hii qui pio oculorum rore genas paullulum perfudere in adversis, homines et sensibiles se estendunt.”

⁴⁴ *Lettere*, 297: “Non equidem ob aliud ab eo [Christ] factum puto, nisi ut exemplum praesentibus daret et posteritati relinqueret ad explendum etiam lacrymis in amicum integrae caritatis officium. Has igitur humanitas et dilectio vera e penetrabilibus cordis obsistentibus praestantissimorum hominum viribus elicit, et in oculis evocatas emittit.”

[When Nature / Gave tears to mankind, she proclaimed that tenderness was endemic / In the human heart: of all our impulses, this / Is the highest and best.]⁴⁵

He goes on to write that this reader was “a man more human than anyone else I have known.”⁴⁶ In contrast to the wooden response of the first reader, the sensitive, compassionate response to suffering and the human condition remains, to the end of their lives, a core component of the humanists’ *humanitas*.

The final years of Petrarch and Boccaccio reveal the tensions within their own thinking and the fragility of their philosophical innovations. Yet these innovations are arguably the most dynamic of the Renaissance and framed the debates about the validity of classical moral thinking in the coming centuries. At the same time, the debates also limited the creative potential of the humanists’ legacy.

In his rebuke to Poggio Bracciolini, Coluccio Salutati declared Petrarch more inventive than Cicero, but did so in context of Petrarch’s service to Christian morality.⁴⁷ Although the struggle over Petrarch’s place in the history of humanism continued long after, in the Quattrocento Alberti and Valla seem to have inherited his sceptical spirit, while Brunini and Poggio by contrast revered the classical canons of literary elegance and philosophical gravity found in Cicero and Aristotle. Yet even as Alberti and Valla surveyed philosophical and religious authority with a scepticism reminiscent of their Trecento predecessors, their dialogues often reflect the interpretative boundaries of the later, more polemical period. Thus Valla’s *On the True and False Good* [*De vero falsoque bono*] pits Stoicism against Epicureanism, to the detriment of the former, eventually proclaiming Christian pleasure as the highest good.⁴⁸

Alberti’s philosophical works are more introspective and enigmatic. Inspired by Lucian’s satires, his writings also appear to draw upon

⁴⁵ *Sen.* XVII.4 in Rossi, ed., *Griselda*, 77–78; Peter Green’s translation in Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, Middlesex 1976, 285–286.

⁴⁶ *Seniles* XVII.4 (Rossi, *Griselda*, 77): “homo humanior quem ego quidem noverim nullus est.”

⁴⁷ Trinkaus, “Antiquitas versus Modernitas: An Italian Humanist Polemic and Its Resonance” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 1 (1987): 11–21, especially 17; see also Ronald Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads: The Life, Works and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1983), 266–271; 403–405.

⁴⁸ In the first version of the dialogue, *De voluptate*, Valla casts Brunini as the spokesman for Stoicism.

the varied nature of Boccaccio's narration. This appreciation, however, still manifests a certain creative and moral restraint. In his dialogue "The Husband" [*Maritus*], Alberti revises the Boccaccian trope of an adulterous wife and cuckolded husband in a way that shows psychological subtlety but also respects moral conventions. In Alberti's story, a husband discovers his wife with her lover. Rather than physically punishing them, he encourages the lover to pursue virtue, and avenges himself on his wife by a silent cruelty, a tolerance that refuses her any affection, whereupon she dies of grief and shame.⁴⁹ The husband's revenge is more refined than that of the scholar Rinieri, but unlike Boccaccio's female *brigata*, the listeners in Alberti's tale—fellow humanists—do not question the avenger's character.⁵⁰ Only Alberti's late satire *Momus* presents a consistent, extended questioning of his time's moral and ontological postulates, for it describes both gods and philosophers to be weak, venal, and quarrelsome. In the work Charon cries out after visiting the material world, "I hate you mortals with your put-on and phony morality!" ["Vestros . . . mortalium personatos et fictos mores odi. . ."].⁵¹

At the close we might ask again: if Boccaccio and Petrarch show greater scepticism toward the traditional moralities, both ecclesiastical and classical, how should one speak of their 'revival of antiquity' in relation to ethics? The humanists look beyond the positing of these moralities to the human condition of the authority, a condition fraught with temporal vicissitude and secret emotion. They gain insight into this condition not only through reading the perceptions of the ancients, especially of the classical poets, but also through experiencing the crises of their age, of Avignon and plague. As we have seen, it is this congruence of classical perception and contemporary, lived experience that allows for an authentic renaissance of ideas. Petrarch and Boccaccio, more than any other authors of their time, re-create for their reader the possibility of understanding the ancients and their ethics in light of his or her own life.

⁴⁹ Leon Battista Alberti, *Intercenales* (ed. F. Bacchelli and L. D'Ascia, Bologna: Pendragon, 2003), 454–468, and David Marsh's translation of Alberti's *Dinner Pieces* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 128–133.

⁵⁰ This failure to indict the husband for his cruelty could well be Alberti's point, but it is not expressed in the text.

⁵¹ *Momus*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown and Sarah Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003), IV.55, p. 316.

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